

A Genealogy of Monotheism: Of Secrets, Substitutes and Supplements

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

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Abstract

Jacques Derrida has noted of God that “God contradicts himself already ... only that which is written gives ... [God] ... existence by naming ... [God]. It is simultaneously true that things come into existence and lose existence by being named” (Derrida 1978a: 70). Naming God can lose God. This is a significant insight for examinations of monotheism, drawing attention to its irrecusable contradictions, paradoxes and constitutive aporias. The significance of this insight is heightened when a second recognition is made regarding monotheism’s own discursive practices of exclusion and displacement, practices that are conventionally based on and legitimated by a narrative of presence. Together these points act to frame this dissertation insofar as they open the question as to their possible reconciliation.

In this dissertation, then, I argue that Derrida’s deconstructive notion of supplementarity can support a genealogical analysis of this problematic informing traditional conceptions of God as the One and Only. God and monotheism – as I will demonstrate – are irrecusably haunted by their supplementarity. Hence, in this dissertation, via a genealogical analysis and close textual readings, I trace the supplementarity already present in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the theo-political, historical, theological and philosophical discourses that underpin and comprise the problematic of monotheism. Following Foucault’s and Derrida’s insights that analysis also facilitates a rethinking or an experiment, I conclude this work by sketching the outlines toward what could be called a deconstructed ethical monotheism. I name this thinking stance towards reconciliation of a One and Only thinking – a return to exile.

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Abbreviations

<i>ANESTP</i>	<i>The Ancient Near East: Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament</i> , J.B. Pritchard (ed.), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969a
<i>ANET</i>	<i>The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , J.B. Pritchard (ed.), 3 rd edn., Princeton: Princeton University, 1969b
BAS	Biblical Archaeology Society
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
CTU	<i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places</i> , D. Manfried, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartín (eds.), 1995
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
DtrH	Deuteronomic History
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NJPS	<i>TANAKH The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i> , New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
LXX	Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
MT	Masoretic Text (text of the Bible in Jewish tradition)
4QDeut	Text(s) from Cave Four at Qumran
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAB	State Archives of Assyria Bulletin
SAAo	State Archives of Assyria Online

Rabbinic Writings (Mishnah, Tosefta) and Talmud

<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Talmud
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah
<i>Meg.</i>	<i>Megillah</i>
<i>Mid.</i>	Midrash
<i>Sanh.</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>t.</i>	Tosefta
<i>y.</i>	Yerushalmi Talmud
<i>yad.</i>	<i>Yadayim</i>

Introduction

For what is put into question is precisely the quest for a rightful beginning, an absolute point of departure, a principal responsibility. (Derrida 1982a, 6)

Counterbalancing the above problematic – which might be (and indeed has been) taken to mean that arbitrariness with regards to beginnings and structures cannot be overcome – Jacques Derrida has also proposed that “[w]e must begin *wherever we are*” (1997a, 162). In this case, with regards to the following project, this means to begin in the midst of what I am naming – with some difficulty (a difficulty Derrida too is also very aware of) – the monotheism of the Hebrew Bible. This could never be a simple beginning point insofar as the collecting and legitimating – the canonising, even – of the texts that are understood as comprising the Hebrew Bible has been a complex and contested process of identity creation and maintenance. Canons appear as naturalised collections and offer to the initiated recognisable (or to the outsider, unfathomable) ways of belonging to groups and communities in the way certain things are valued, that is, prioritised, over others.¹ Borders are shored up and protected, boundaries being important for the sake of continuity. Art canons provide a useful demonstration of the process of valuing that occurs, and the trajectory of what it ‘is’ that they work to solidify. In the art world, for example, canons of representation are legitimated with trajectories that extend, in one such instance, from Impressionism, Expressionism, and Cubism through Dada and Surrealism and to Abstract Expressionism. We can imagine this canon being ratified by and reinforcing the sphere in which it (and not just any instance of art or creative expression) operates or exerts influence, such as in the formal learning and dissemination of art history, curating, public display, consumption and praise of what counts as art culture. A particular discourse of art thus becomes formalised with works that fall into the processes of establishing categories (the canonising) and/or recognised (the canon) categories being endorsed to varying degrees (endorsed in the sense of being acknowledged and discussed, not necessarily ‘liked’),

¹ Note the capitalisation attributed to canons. Canons are capital(ised). That is, they are important and central to a specific product or activity. They are also capital in the sense of their capacity to circulate and regulate what is circulated. In this latter sense, canons are related to a society’s economic control (of what is circulated, or withheld from circulation). They are assets in the fiscal, cultural and political sense. Additionally, work included in canons can also be positioned as capital in the sense of being, for example, a really capital read (an excellent read) – few would deny the acuity with which Jane Austen lays bare social mores and critiques class structure in her writing. I further discuss the function of canon in Chapter One.

and work that fails to be included falling by the wayside perhaps until someone deems it suitable (as with Stencil Street art, for example).² Biblical canons, however, seem different in that they appear more watertight and less forgiving of intrusion, difference and change. Those who control them are protective of certain beginnings and boundaries. Whilst the canons of literature and the art world continue to expand their collections, biblical canons do not, or only very rarely. Biblical canon operates as more than simply a collection of similar materials, a genre, or a fashionable point in time. Biblical canon is a communal decision and a community-defining decision.

And yet, at the same time, this canon is consistently under stress, fracturing and supplementing its events and community. On the one hand, this biblical canon – what I will be talking about as the canon of thinking of God as One, centre, ground and limit – has been enormously influential. It has informed the trajectories of both western theology and philosophy (of what Martin Heidegger has called onto-theology³), of metaphysical, religious and ethico-political belief systems and practices, and of much human experience and history. It has, however, also been a problematic tradition riven with schism and impasses, with systemic failures, unable to gather or hold itself in coherence, and unable to sustain its own ground, centre and limit of a working metaphysical account of a monotheistic God. And this, Wolfhart Pannenberg (1990) has cautioned, marks one of the most pressing (onto-)theological problems of the twenty

² The process of *bricolage* and the appropriation of these art forms away from the street and into the gallery (a space of achievement and acknowledgement of art – or, perhaps, Art), or indeed their upload onto the Internet and Social Media, are processes of legitimation and mobilisation beyond the bounds of this dissertation (as is an examination of the kinds of ‘street cred’ and ‘authenticity’ attributed to Street Art once it has been capitalised, once it has been so named). The status given, however, to the work of Banksy, a UK graffiti artist, political activist, film director, author and painter, exemplifies these contested processes of legitimation, the liminal space that some art occupies, and resistance to the process of canonisation. Whilst his graffiti and stencil work is well known and a sought after commodity, Banksy (a pseudonym) eludes both the capture of his work in traditional gallery spaces, and capture by the authorities (he is wanted for numerous instances of public ‘vandalism’). In a very real sense, someone like Banksy and his art/activism escapes many of the mechanisms that seek to produce and regulate art/activism/identity. One result of this escapology is that Banksy remains distinctive in his subversion of totalitarian systems such as art, law, and capitalism, and yet his work has been removed and sold at public and private auctions for in excess of £500,000 (BBC News, 3 June 2008). In August 2005, Banksy painted nine images on the Israeli West Bank barrier, including an image of a ladder going up and over the wall and an image of children digging a hole through the wall. Banksy’s political re-imagining on the barrier is a pertinent reminder of resistance – to totalising systems such as meta-narratives, canonisation, and identity formation – and re-imagination – of the other, the self and of location (*The Guardian* 2011). Such possibilities of resistance to and re-imagination of canon and canonised discourses hold an important role in this dissertation.

³ Although the term *ontotheology* was first used by Kant (2005) in reference to the metaphysical deduction of God’s existence with no appeal to experience, Heidegger uses the term throughout his work to mark what he sees as the inability of western metaphysics to think the conditions of its own possibility. According to Heidegger, metaphysics-as-ontotheology is enabled by a withdrawal and forgetting of that which enables it: Being reveals itself in beings, but in so doing, conceals itself as itself. This means that metaphysics can only think Being with reference to beings; metaphysics “refers to Being and means beings as beings” (Heidegger 1969, 211). Heidegger’s engagements of onto-theology will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

first century. Jean-Luc Marion agrees, noting that “the fate of God could not avoid joining in the fate of metaphysics, for better or worse” (1997, 279). And if, as John Caputo points out, in speaking of “philosophy *and* theology”, the most important word is the “and” (2006a, 3), what kind of “and”, and what kinds of God and thinking, can still stand insofar as modern philosophy – what I will later call the *via moderna negativa*⁴ – has pronounced the death of not only God but metaphysics, a death that continues to be re-iterated and re-traced through even the theological turn of later thinking. My dissertation looks to pursue this issue. More specifically, it looks to develop and trace a genealogy of the monotheistic traditions informing and played out through onto-theology and the biblical canon, with an aim of examining what remains for God and thinking if God as One, centre, ground and limit can only be destabilised and deconstructed. In this case, if, as Derrida (reading Heidegger) suggests, “metaphysics” – and hence God – “always returns”, the question is how and in what ways this “promise of *spirit*” might work (1989b, 94). In other words, what kinds of events, communities and canons might this (deconstructed) promise of God – this “yes before all opposition of *yes* and *no*” (ibid.) – give rise to?

I do, however, need to make several points of clarification before I can take Derrida’s advice and begin properly in the midst of the canonised monotheisms, events and communities comprising the Hebrew Bible. The first concerns the use of the word ‘canon’ in relation to the Hebrew Bible (variously inscribed as the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, Tanakh, depending on where one chooses to position the collection or one’s relation to it).⁵ Karel van der Toorn reminds us that the word ‘canon’ is a Christian one and that using it in relation to the Hebrew Bible “is a little awkward” (van der Toorn 2007, 233). In relation to the Hebrew Bible, my use of the word canon – engaging κανών for ‘list’ or ‘table’, and καταλογος or ‘catalogue’ – is also problematic. I use it here, however, and in Chapter One, to draw attention to the construct of lists, tables and catalogues that have become more popularly known as books, scrolls and collections bound and ratified by various communities of faith into sacrosanct and

⁴ By the *via moderna negativa*, I refer to the re-inscription of the *via negativa* (the negative way informing the traditions of Negative Theology) into modern philosophy (and beyond). See my Chapters Four, Five and Six for my discussion of this re-inscription.

⁵ For the most part, I utilise the term ‘Hebrew Bible’ to denote the Anglicised and bi-lingual versions of Jewish Scripture. I variously use ‘Old Testament’, ‘Christian Scripture’, ‘Tanakh’, and ‘Torah’ when discussing a particular orientation towards the text. Both ‘Hebrew Bible’ and ‘Old Testament’ are employed indiscriminately in this dissertation. Sometimes people’s choice between them is supposed to reflect a deep ideological meaning. For me, this is not so. Although it is true that the name ‘Old Testament’ is Christian in origin, it has a long history as a common and conventional term for the Hebrew Scriptures, and I use it as such, alternatively with other terms.

(largely) closed books.⁶ That is, I am using this term here so as to draw attention to the way the process of legitimating texts operates⁷ so as to better illustrate the processes of marginalisation and exclusion that, I argue, occur when texts are closed or are perceived to be closed. It thus draws attention to the deployment of the double closure whereby a text not only precludes other texts but itself becomes closed and sacred,⁸ further imposing notions as to how it should be read and used.⁹ What the idea of canon thus makes visible is how *a* text becomes *the* Text, how it becomes a One and Only that is or at least seems non-negotiable. This makes the idea(l) of a/the Biblical canon(s) – recalling there are different or competing canons for different groups – a collection of writings that produces and enforces the ideology or system of beliefs and values of the community that regards this collection as authoritative.¹⁰ In other words a canon is produced by a community's desire for a mechanism able to control the meaning of its constituent texts, and indirectly the meaning of any text (i.e., *this* is the way the world *is*). The seal(ing) of canon supports the believing community's desire for a reading context through which the component texts – and world – can be understood. Canon both reflects the community's beliefs and becomes the mechanism to enforce them. Canons imagine communities (to misquote Benedict Anderson). These issues are examined in further detail in Chapter One, providing a productive ground for my subsequent genealogical tracings of monotheistic discourses.

A second point of clarification concerns what I am in this dissertation (mostly) calling the Hebrew Bible. Whether one accepts or rejects the theological claim of the

⁶ A further point of clarification is in regard to the idea of sacrosanct texts such as canonical versus sacred texts. Sacred texts are typically connected with God or a god, or dedicated to a religious purpose and deserving of veneration. More precisely, sacred texts embody the laws or doctrines of, for example, the Judeo-Christian traditions. Sacred texts are regarded as too valuable to the community to be interfered with, and are thus sacrosanct. Canonical texts provide a criterion by which something is judged, for example, morality, piety, or sexual conduct. Canonical texts are (in)vested with 'power' to operate in this way because they have been accepted as genuine by a ruling body, such as the Church of England Grand Synod or the Roman Catholic Church. Canonical texts are thus very much concerned with the regulation of law and society.

⁷ This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter One. See also David Stern's (1990) *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*.

⁸ The dyslexic in me reads 'sacred' as 'scared'. Whilst this reveals something about my own anxieties around reading and meaning-making, I also want to suggest that closed texts, texts purporting to be sacred, are also somehow anxious about their state of meaning-making.

⁹ See, for example, Solomon A. Nigosian (2004) *Ancient Writings to Sacred Texts: The Old Testament and Apocrypha*.

¹⁰ By 'ideology' I mean the 'mythologies' about human life that effectively articulate what is at stake in a way of life (i.e. an historical epoch defined by a type of economic productive activity) while at the same time they obscure what is really going on. Although the term 'ideology' is associated with Marxism and with Critical Theory, I am using it more loosely in the vein of political philosophy to refer to an overall system of ideas motivating an individual or a group. By way of extension, then, my use of ideology is concerned to critique not so much the religious assumptions of monotheism in the Hebrew Bible, but more so the cultural assumptions that rest on the text and the use of the text, both of which often escape the confines of the religious community they are used to regulate.

Bible's divine origin,¹¹ what is generally meant in saying 'the Bible' today is a series of texts stitched together to form a particular canon.¹² The Hebrew Bible is thus not a book in the conventional sense but a collection of various documents, written over a number of centuries and woven together into what appears to be (or claims to be) a seamless whole. This position can be maintained whether one believes these documents (or some of them) were given by God or conceived, written, or redacted by human beings. The rabbinic sages, for example, while maintaining a strong belief in the divinity of the Torah, were themselves quite open about their role in 'creating', through the vexing process of canonisation, what is now known as the Hebrew Bible.¹³

On this reading, of course, the Hebrew Bible is not, in fact, 'biblical' but 'rabbinic'.¹⁴ That is, the disparate documents that are woven together in the Hebrew Bible *are* biblical (meaning only that they 'originate' in what scholars loosely call the 'biblical period' extending from the tenth to the second centuries BCE), but *the* Bible is something different. More specifically, the (proto) rabbinic sages in the last century before the Common Era – perhaps even stretching into the Common Era (henceforth CE) – constructed what we know as *the* Hebrew Bible through a complex and often contentious process of selection among texts. Through this process – that is, canonisation – they essentially invented a sacred document.¹⁵ Viewed as such, the Hebrew Bible is a book of dissensus and exclusion from its very inception as there were many texts circulating that were excluded from the rabbinic construction of the Hebrew Bible for a myriad of reasons. Some of these excluded texts expressed ideas the sages felt were not coherent with their view of the covenant and what the Bible should be saying, and some were excluded because they were only extant at the time in languages other than Hebrew or Aramaic, the latter having been determined as the exclusive

¹¹ The divine origin of the Hebrew Bible is canonised as doctrine in Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon's 'Thirteen Principles of Faith' that first appears in his (supplementary) commentary to *Mishna Sanhedrin*, Chapter 10:1. Maimonides makes his position clear in his *Mishne Torah*, 'Laws of Repentance', 3:8. See also *Babylonian Talmud*, Sanhedrin 90b. All references to Rabbinic and Talmudic works are to The Sefaria Library Online (www.sefaria.org) unless otherwise stated.

¹² See Robert Alter's (1998, 131-149) "The Double Canonicity of the Hebrew Bible".

¹³ See Philip R. Davies (1998, 4-14, 37-58); and Page Kelley, Daniel Mynatt and Timothy Crawford's (1998) *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

¹⁴ One might also say that the Synoptic Gospels, even John, are not 'Christian' texts but products of 'Jewish Christian' communities before Christianity became a distinct religion. Much of the Christian Testament (or New Testament) comprises an Israelite/Jewish struggle to come to terms with the vexing internal debate about messianism and salvation. The internal struggle, and one solution to it, expanded beyond Jewish identity and Judaism and became another religion.

¹⁵ Whilst it is contentious to use the term 'canonisation' in relation to Hebrew Bible formation, I maintain the utility of the term for drawing attention to the way the process of legitimating texts operates – the process of canonisation hopes to close down written texts, whilst readers constantly escape the boundaries sought by the process. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter One. See also David Stern (1990, 6).

languages of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶ In addition, the rabbis may have excluded some ancient Israelite materials because they resembled nascent Christianity or other marginal movements within Israelite society. In any case, once chosen, the canon was duly fashioned to tell a very particular story, a ‘rabbinic’ story, of the prehistory and subsequent early history of Israel.¹⁷

There are three further points to be made here (each of which will be examined in detail throughout this dissertation). The first is that the biblical texts as they are now known are products of collective (religious but inescapably socio-political) imagination and selection arguably seeking divine verification. A second point concerns the ‘status’ of these same biblical documents. What makes them sacrosanct – part of the canon – is their purported inalterability founded on a claim they are divine in substance, divinely inspired in construction, and that only they (and the communities who subscribe to them and the authorities which regulate their use) convey the true will of the one God. Concurrently, however, these very same biblical documents are dissenting texts, incessantly demonstrating the supplementing of one divine history (*heilesgeschichte*) with others either internal to their own nascent traditions or in response to external competition. Hence the totalising idea(l) of the One and Only God imagined as ‘monotheism’ – and legitimated in/as the biblical canon – is constantly placed in jeopardy throughout the Bible’s inception, transmission and interpretation. It is, as I argue throughout this dissertation, a text that can simply neither maintain its delineation of the One and Only nor maintain its own boundaries. Furthermore, attempts to shore up the logic of One and Only thinking espoused by monotheism – a thinking that I will show is largely retrojectively layered over older oral traditions and written practices – perpetuate exclusion and divisiveness. Operations of violence lie at the very heart of – supplementing – this sacred construction, a subsumption that will be shown to be an ongoing trope within my dissertation (albeit one that surfaces and is engaged with in different ways throughout the chapters), addressed most directly in the final parts.

The third point concerns the plurality and complex of dissent that marks both monotheism and its vehicle for this dissertation, the Hebrew Bible, as well as the approach taken by this dissertation. As should already be clear – and will be elaborated throughout this dissertation – the theorisation and legitimation of monotheism has produced a range of different models, approaches and narratives. Different models

¹⁶ There are other Hebrew books that were excluded as well, for instance, *Sefer Yashar* (the *Book of Jashar* mentioned in Josh 10:13 and 2 Sam 1:18), and the *Book of the Wars of Yhwh* (a lost book mentioned in Num 21:14-15).

¹⁷ See James Charlesworth (1983) *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*; Edgar Goodspeed (1989) *The Apocrypha*; Michael Fishbane (1989, 124) *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*.

produce and follow different paths to different ends and, importantly, they cannot all be integrated into a single linear history or teleology. It is in this sense that this dissertation – and indeed monotheism itself – needs to be understood as genealogical in nature, drawing here on Michel Foucault’s delineation of genealogy. Genealogy, as Foucault details it, is (tentative) history, attuned not to any search for or stabilisation of origins, or the development of any identity or unity, of fixed verities – as informs metaphysical investigations – but to the play of the relations that comprise every charted ‘unity’. It is a perspectival rather than holistic history that inevitably deconstructs what is framed as unified, whilst concurrently noting the presence of weak continuities, the product of what Foucault calls “discontinuous systematicities” (1981, 69). It is, as such, always a problematising, an unearthing of the force and play of relations that operate in and frame particular events and historical developments, as well as a mapping of these relations as they interconnect in surprising ways.

Genealogy thus stresses the complexity of relations (and their interrelationality), registering their inability to be fully subordinated to any general unificatory narratives and seeing them rather as needing to be considered in their locality and specificity. It seeks to illuminate the contingency of what is taken for granted, to denaturalise what seems immutable, to destabilise seemingly natural categories as constructs.

Furthermore, Foucauldian genealogy shows how subjects, identities and of course canons are constituted through discursive practices that in effect work to disguise and produce – and correspondingly to delimit – specific ways of understanding the world. With regards to this dissertation, then, a genealogical approach means that I will be examining and mapping the diversity of discursive practices that comprise the problematic of monotheism, paying particular attention to the aporias that disrupt the smooth functioning of these discursive practices to shore up and legitimate specific constructs of identity. It is worth stressing that genealogies examine and map messy histories – or they show that histories, traditions and canons are messy – in this case the field of cross-cutting and interlinking discursive practices informing monotheism, practices that differentially engage with each other as well as with a manifold of events, artefacts and themes. Finally, genealogical analysis displays a logic which also has, as Foucault sees it, an ethico-political aim, comprising a striving to transform the present, to open up new trajectories for thought and action. As he has put this, as “an analysis of the ... limits that are imposed on us”, genealogy can also work to create the space for “an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (1984, 50). This doubled aim of the genealogical framework is integral for this dissertation.

It is this doubled aim of genealogy that allows me finally to address my objectives with regards to this problematic canon of the Hebrew Bible. Specifically, my aim is to develop a genealogy of not just the processes of canonisation attendant on the Hebrew Bible but of the work of what I am calling – after Derrida – its supplementarity. That is, I aim to trace and examine genealogically the doubled and doubling work of canonisation and supplementarity throughout various of what have come to be named – canonised – as key events comprising the monotheism informing the Hebrew Bible. I am, in other words – re-orienting one of Foucault’s descriptions of his own work – offering a history of the events and/as discursive practices informing the monotheism of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁸ Here I am drawing on Foucault’s understanding of the event, not meaning simply something with a beginning and end, but something that is always open to being re-actualised in other manners. Understood this way, an event is always actualised and understood in terms of discursive practices. This work will take up the first seven chapters of this dissertation. The last chapter takes up the challenge of the Foucauldian experiment, but does so with reference also to the Derridean stringencies regarding supplementarity. These aims, however, require several further clarifications and caveats, not the least of which is to sound out a little more of the theoretical and methodological framework of this dissertation before further elaborating the operating context, subject and structure of my project.

Genealogy and Eventalisation

There is today an expansive history related to Foucault’s genealogical method, the majority of which also takes note of the impossibility of framing this method in any totalising or closed way. Nonetheless, as was noted above about the genealogical method, it is evident that Foucault’s own genealogies pose the question of which kinds of practices tied to which kinds of conditions would determine the frameworks, structures and logics that are taken as canon. Genealogy in this sense is “meticulous and patiently documentary”, recording “the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality” (Foucault 1977, 139) whilst remaining:

sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the natural curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they are engaged in different

¹⁸ Foucault explained in a 1968 article that his project was to offer a “history of discursive practices” (1991b, 64).

roles. Finally, genealogy must define even those instances where they are absent, the moment when they remained unrealized. (ibid., 140)

The genealogical method thus renders itself attentive to details, to what may remain unnoticed within canon, through its tracing of the relations of power and domination that produce, disseminate, legitimate and consolidate canon. Here I am treating canon as what Foucault has called a discursive practice, recognising that this entails far more than linguistic usage, that in a discourse, “words, materialities and practices hang together in a specific, historically and culturally situated way” (Mol 2008, 9). In Foucault’s words, a discursive practice is “characterized by the demarcation of a field of objects, by the definition of a legitimate perspective for a subject of knowledge, by the setting of norms for elaborating concepts and theories” (Foucault 1997, 11). Recognised as a discursive practice, then, any event or even a canon would thus be informed by the “play of prescriptions” governing “exclusions and selections” (ibid.). Under this framework, a discursive practice can take textual forms but it must be remembered that such forms are always surrounded and informed by social practices and political governance which prescribe not only what is selected and excluded but what they can do. Furthermore, discursive practices remain mutable, establishing an “interaction of heterogeneous elements (institutions, techniques, social groups, perceptual organizations, relations between various discourses)” (1991a, 72). Discursive practices, in other words, both shape the world and produce partial, situated knowledges or truths which remain always open to further contestation and negotiation, even as they tend to “conceal their own invention” (Foucault quoted in Ball 1990, 2).

If, then, Foucault’s genealogical approach facilitates the exploring and tracing of the developments and operations of discursive practices, and it is recognised that these are operations to do with regulated prescriptions, more needs to be said about the extent of this regulation. This requires a consideration of Foucault’s understanding of the operations of power. In his “Two Lectures on Power”, Foucault (1980c) outlines a number of methodological imperatives with regards to the study of power. Here, while recognising that sovereign power does exist, he argues that it is not the only type of power in circulation and offers a series of alternative propositions. First he notes that the analysis of power should not be directed solely at the “regulated and legitimate forms of power in their central locations but with power at its extremities ... at those points where it becomes capillary” (1980c, 96). To understand power’s day-to-day operations, its participants and its effects requires attending to normative social relations and (as) disciplinary power/knowledge relations. Secondly the analysis of power must not

overemphasise the conscious intentions and motivations of individuals. The more important questions than those concerning who has power are those that examine how power installs and pervades, how it acquires the status of ‘truth’ or norm – or canon – and how it induces truth regimes or discursive practices which operate to produce particular subject positions (insiders or outsiders being one such instance of pertinent subject positions with regards to the canons of monotheism) and both dominant and subjugated knowledges.¹⁹ For this dissertation, one relevant question would be how regimes and their various discursive practices, as informing and expressed throughout the different events of monotheism and (as) the Hebrew Bible, are expressed through power/knowledge relations, and gain status as norms or truths?

Third Foucault argues that power is always employed and exercised through “a net-like organisation” (1980c, 98). Under this organisation power is “never localised, here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth” (ibid.). Finally, he argues for an “ascending analysis” of power, whereby attention is also given to the “molecular elements”, the “infinitesimal mechanisms, all of which have their own histories, own trajectories, own techniques and tactics” (ibid., 99). This challenges the idea that power can only be repressive, recognising that power always also has a productive quality. Thus, power:

traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression. (ibid.)

This possibility of harnessing power at the level of micropractices made visible through an ascending analytics of power is a reprise of the experimental and emancipatory impulses of the genealogical method.

¹⁹ Foucault challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of ‘episodic’ or ‘sovereign’ acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. “Power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere” so in this sense is neither agency nor a structure (Foucault 1990, 93). Instead it is a kind of ‘metapower’ or ‘régime of truth’ that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation. Foucault used the term ‘power/knowledge’ to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and ‘truth’:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effect of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1980b, 131)

Using a genealogical approach to understand the events and operations – the discursive practices – of monotheism thus means a focus on the networks and micropractices of what Foucault has called eventalisation. If events are understood as a random result of the interweaving of relations and practices of power – “devoid of any grounding in an original” (Foucault 1980a, 177) – genealogy is thus interested in the practices and regimes that coalesce around the appearance of an event. As a method of analysis, genealogy further searches events to trace discontinuities, recurrences and play where traditional historiographies of the canon see continuous development, progress and seriousness. Eventalisation thus begins with “making visible a *singularity* at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant, an immediate anthropological trait, or an obviousness that imposes uniformity on all” (Foucault 1991c, 76). Insofar as it means rediscovering the “connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies and so on” (ibid.) that inform any event – breaching its self-evidence as Foucault also puts this – eventalisation requires a making visible and rethinking of the various power relations that at a certain point decisively influenced the ways things were socially and decisively established. As Foucault notes, this rethinking reveals “a sort of multiplication or pluralization of causes” (ibid.), meaning that any event under scrutiny needs to be analysed within the matrix of discursive (and non-discursive) practices that have given rise to its existence.

This in turn means that rather than “going deep, looking for origins and hidden meanings” (Tamboukou 1999, 208), the genealogist is working on the surface, constructing and mapping a “‘polygon’ or rather a ‘polyhedron’” (Foucault 1991c, 77) from the various other processes and practices that surround and inform the emergence of an event. Foucault indeed stresses the point that genealogical eventalisation leads to an increasing polymorphism realised first with regards to the related elements, second with regards to the relations, and third with regards to the domain of reference (ibid.). The genealogist, in other words, examines events to both draw attention to and disrupt their regimes of practice, analysing their descent and emergence, as well as their operations. Finally, that an evental genealogy can only start with a major interrogation of what has been accepted as truth – canon – means that the beginning point can only be one of initially identifiable events – of beginning where we are as Derrida puts this – which, however, can be shown to take on polymorphic shapes that exceed and disrupt their canonised framings. It is this orientation, then, that informs my dissertation.

Eventalising Monotheism

It is important to stress that, although genealogical in nature, this dissertation also cannot hope to cover all of the events and (as) discursive practices comprising the development of monotheism in the Hebrew Bible, or examine all the ways in which construals of monotheism have been deployed to shore up identities (religious, national, in short a range of cultural assumptions). Such a map would conceivably have to detail the manifold and interlinked dimensions of the human condition itself. This being so, this dissertation can only build a partial and perspectival map of the monotheistic events. Other maps would be possible. What is important, however, is that the map constructed achieves these aims of analysis and consequent experiment; these aims drive this dissertation. Of the map to be constructed, several key terms need to be flagged now as they are understood and engaged variously by the diverse discursive practices of monotheism considered throughout the course of the dissertation. Terms such as ‘God’, ‘Israel’, and ‘monotheism’ are perhaps the most contentious and loaded. To begin with – and in the context of this dissertation – ‘God’ refers to a range of cultural assumptions about a deity from the ancient Near East that find a particular formulation in monotheistic traditions. In the context of my dissertation I am primarily concerned with a Judeo-Christian conception of God, which I show to be structured around the need to create and maintain certain identities and social orders at the expense (or in competition) with others.²⁰ As I will set out, this conception of God functions as a kind of discursive anchor, shoring up and striving to close biblical canon(s).²¹

The term ‘Israel’ must also be assigned a caveat, particularly given the publication of *In Search of ‘Ancient Israel’* by Philip R. Davies (1992) in which Davies renewed the debate over the referent being alluded to when using the word ‘Israel’ and the kinds of methods employed to make those links. As he later writes, “[p]revious scholarship has left us with an ‘ancient Israel’, which I shall designate with quotation marks in order to distinguish it from biblical Israel and historical Israel” (P. Davies 1998, 11). Like Davies, I too deal with a number of different ‘Israels’. The literary Israel as found in the Bible is ‘biblical Israel’; ‘historical Israel’ refers to the inhabitants

²⁰ This ‘God’ operates discursively and is not merely the One and Only God, but also conventionally framed as eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, aphysical (and therefore invisible), inscrutable, and incomprehensible, as well as just, good, compassionate, merciful, and benevolent.

²¹ It could also be said that this God functions as a meta-narrative in the Lyotardian sense, that is, as a universalising and homogeneous mythological structure that is used to account for the origin and legitimacy of particular institutions and practices. See Jean-François Lyotard’s (1988) *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* and *The Postmodern Condition* (1984).

of the northern Palestinian highlands during part of the Iron Age; and ‘ancient Israel’ is what academics and theologians have constructed out of an amalgamation of the two others.²² Therefore, the ‘Children of Israel’ will usually be referred to as ‘Israelites’ even though that term has multiple meanings and may be historically inaccurate for the people who depart Egypt. That is, as a religio-ethnic designation, it may come from a period later than that which the text purports to describe. In the Hebrew Bible, ‘Israel’ sometimes denotes the northern kingdom of the late tenth to eighth centuries BCE and sometimes a larger ethno-political entity. It can be a political, ethnic, and theological term – an abstract concept as well as the designation of a nation or people. Movements between each of these referents are clearly indicated as I progress my arguments.

Just as terms such as ‘God’ and ‘Israel’ are problematic, so too are the texts one chooses to draw upon. As already discussed, the idea(l) of Bible has been contested throughout various religious traditions. In this dissertation, I primarily draw on the Oxford NRSV (2001), the JPS Hebrew-English *Tanakh* (1999) and The Stone Editions of *The Tanach* (1996) and *The Chumash* (1994) variously, indicating when and why I move between these and other Bible translations.²³ So too with editions of other works. For instance, with regards to Heidegger’s work, I switch between the first English translation by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (2004a), the Joan Stambaugh translation (1996), and the revised Stambaugh translation by Dennis J. Schmidt (2010a). This ‘slippage’ between translations is deliberate and necessary to my overall project of genealogically eventalising monotheism in the Hebrew Bible, and furthermore keeps my own trinity – of the arbitrariness of meaning, the supplementary and subversive nature of text, and the dynamics of interpretation/canonisation – at the forefront of my own methodological process and socio-historical positioning. This is also reflected in my use of, where possible, original terms and phrases (in Hebrew, Greek, French, and German) and, in some instances, their English transliterations (from Ugaritic, Greek and Hebrew). To work with a single translation of a text from philosophy’s tradition, theology’s tradition or ancient Near Eastern literature’s tradition would be to repeat a

²² A. R. Hulst (1962), an academic in Hebrew, Old Testament Archaeology and Babylonian-Assyrian, listed seven different referents for ‘Israel’ within biblical literature, whilst renowned Hebrew Bible academic John H. Hayes (1989) expanded Hulst’s list by another three.

²³ It is not uncommon for the choice of biblical text to shift or for competing or more conservative editions to be utilised. For example, in the ‘Preface’ to *Hebrew Life and Literature*, Bernhard Lang writes, “over the past few decades I have switched allegiance first from the New English Bible to the NRSV, and eventually to the more conservative English Standard Version; the traces of these preferences have not been deleted, for each of these translations has its undeniable merits” (Lang 2008, xi). Advances in computing technology are able to provide greater access to different translations, traditions and variants in manuscripts – for example being able to access scanned manuscripts from Qumran – and new visions of canonization to be built – such as The Sefaria Library – an online (and mobile) purpose-built, multi-referenced, hyper-linked platform for the study of Jewish texts.

pattern I am keen to break with. Thus, slippage is intentional and, as I argue throughout, unavoidable.

‘Monotheism’ is, of course, another highly contested term in need of some clarification. At its core is the theist’s belief that reality’s ultimate principle is God – an omnipotent, omniscient, goodness that is the creator of everything other than itself. It is the pursuit of an absolute, divine claim to authority, and rejects as impossible all truths save for the one – which is deemed absolute in nature – that resides at the core of its own identity. Monotheism is thus the view that there is only one God. The term, however, has been picked-up variously by theologians and philosophers over the course of several centuries of scholarship, becoming complicated with claims to *ur*-monotheism, proto-monotheism, ethical monotheism, strict monotheism, and variants of inclusive monotheism depending upon the theoretical and/or religious positioning of the theologian or philosopher in question. Although some of these are discussed in Chapter One, in the context of this dissertation I begin by un-complicating this term and return focus to what it *does*, more so than what it claims to describe, encompass or be. In the sense I use it, then, at least initially, monotheism refers to the various socio-historical, theo-political and literary traditions and discursive practices that have resulted in a single, male deity being espoused as the one, true God. When I refer to monotheism, then, I also make reference to the discursive practices, systemic structures and canonised events that have resulted in what I call the logic of a One and Only thinking.

‘Systemic monotheism’ is the idea that a logic of a One and Only thinking has infiltrated text, thought, and tradition, and furthermore, that such a manoeuvre represents a fundamental closure of the Bible. One purpose of this dissertation is hence to trace the genealogy of this closure, to trace how the various intersecting events and practices of monotheism have worked to endorse a logic of the One and Only. At the same time – or at least in the final chapters – this genealogical tracing will make clear that this logic is always and already under deconstruction, that this closure is never complete. Indeed, it will be made clear that there is nothing that I – or any academic working with a genealogical or deconstructionist lens in this space – can do to the Bible that it has not already done to itself, that it could not do to itself.²⁴ In demonstrating, for instance, that there are grammatical inconsistencies in assigning a One and Only-ness to God in the Hebrew Bible, and that retrojecting a logic of the One and Only back on to

²⁴ I am not here claiming that texts have agency. Rather, I am pointing to the idea that this text is not able to contain a singular narrative or meaning (of God). As such, and for my re-reading informed by post-structuralism, the text is more likely to be multiplicitous, palimpsestuous, even duplicitous in the variety of interpretations its construction lends itself to.

texts and traditions is only one possibility of many, this dissertation foregrounds – through the lenses of diverse perspectives and (as) discursive practices: biblical, historical, theological and philosophical – a form of textual errancy, a deviant kind of behaviour on the part of the Bible, that it should contain plurality and multiplicity within it, within plain sight, and yet strive to keep it hidden. This points to the second major aim of this dissertation, to engage a deconstructionist lens that, not actually altering the text or its constituent parts, rather works with what is always already within the Hebrew Bible – as shown through genealogical analysis – to show how its monotheism is simultaneously made possible and ruined by its larger logic of supplementarity. That is to say, this dissertation also aims to make evident that monotheism's *différance*, supplementarity and *aporias* all both comprise and collapse the long history of monotheism's concurrent transmission, translation and deconstruction. This is an important point and – insofar as it will entail an engagement of a Derridean logic along with and within Foucauldian genealogical practices – needs as such some initial clarification. (Derrida's practices and logic regarding deconstruction and supplementarity will also become the focus in the final two chapters.)

In one sense this dual engagement of Foucauldian and Derridean practices and logics is unproblematic. Both practices, after all, stress an engagement with what is excluded, both draw attention to the tenuousness and arbitrariness of the normative and the established. In this sense, it may be asked why engage a Derridean logic at all? My answer to this concerns the specific nature of the discursive practices under consideration, in particular their appeals to ideals concerning origin, essence and presence.²⁵ That is, insofar as the Foucauldian practices prioritise the examination of the

²⁵ The term presence (like absence) describes a fundamental state of being. The metaphysical tradition can be characterised by two basic desires or trends, admittedly manifested in various different forms, with many complex and subtle inflections and widely differing doctrines, particular styles, tones and contents. First there is a consistently manifested desire to reconstruct a transcendental realm, which is otherwise radically absent. The lost origin of our finite or fallen state drives us to continuously reconstruct our beginnings. Second, in the search for lost origins the ideal and supreme value of presence turns up everywhere. All aspects of experience and/or existence are relegated to a moment of *presence*. But the ideal of presence always implies more than one moment, and this is worth unpacking further. Presence, we assume, describes an original state, a state that must have come first. As I gaze out into the world I can say the world is present to my observing eye. If that is the case, then my observing consciousness must be present to my own self-reflection. It thus follows that *meaning*, in its most pure sense, as conscious thought, must be present to me as I gaze out onto the world. Presence is, therefore, the main predicate for a text's meaning (its sense or its reference), despite the fact that this meaning is always absent and in need of reconstruction through reading or interpretation. For this reason, a second moment of presence invades consciousness as absence – the disappearance of the world behind the veils of language, consciousness going astray, the reign of death, non-sense, and irrationality. In this way aporias, absences and deficiencies of all imaginable kinds (the structurality or play of a structure) are subordinated to a principle of presence. After all, is it possible to imagine an absence without reference to the principle of presence?

conditions that make the emergence and legitimation of certain (versions of) discursive practices over others possible, the focus tends to be on the multiplicity of the social and power/knowledge affordances of a discursive practice. Discursive practices are thereby recognised and revealed as concurrently accidental and socially produced; they are events in the way Foucault understands. Importantly, however, Foucault as a genealogist gives no special weight to any of the accidents and conditions informing an event's emergence. Focus on the formation and legitimation of truth claims can make visible the inclusions and exclusions informing them; mapping the transformations of the same practice or event in its dispersal can reveal the multiplicity of possible frameworks and that there may be no convergence possible among this multiplicity. Can, however, this work show that this same practice is never wholly one in any of its manifest dispersions? And what is the significance of this disclosure?

These are questions that are difficult to ask within the Foucauldian approach insofar as in tracing different dispersions of an identity or discursive practice – such as that (or those) comprising the God of monotheism – attention is effectively given to the emergence of the multiplicity of different manifestations of the supposed same identity marker. Under this framework – and as Foucault notes explicitly – what becomes clear is that “behind” events and discursive practices there is no “timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms” (Foucault 1977, 142). The genealogist, in other words, is striving to dispel the “chimeras of the origin” (ibid., 144). This, however, is precisely where Derrida departs from Foucault given that he – Derrida – underscores the necessity of “continuing to ask questions of origin” (Derrida 1997a, 74). That is, for Derrida, the impossibility of ever tracing a simple origin – of multiplying or pluralising causes as Foucault puts it – does not and cannot override the necessity of still pursuing the question of that origin, a pursuit in fact necessary for giving any account as to how such an identity or event can be rendered intelligible. Derrida demonstrates this point through his investigation of the history of writing and the writing of history, and it is a point of paramount significance to considering the discursive practices that mark the making of all social, political and religious identities:

It would be a radical absence, something always and from the beginning absent, missing, lost to experience. If there was such an absence, how could we glimpse it? One possibility is that we glimpse it between repetitions as their repeatability. If the present moment can be repeated (i.e. remembered) then, preceding the present moment is the possibility of its being repeated in memory (i.e., memory itself as repeatability). So memory precedes and exceeds the present moment, which we will have remembered. Memory, as traditional accounts make clear, gets associated with death and the memorialising of the dead, or mourning, in a way that gets us back, always and from the beginning, to the second moment (absence).

But the question of origin is at first confounded with the question of essence. It may just as well be said that it presupposes an onto-phenomenological question in the strict sense of that term. One must know *what* writing *is* in order to ask – knowing what one is talking about and what *the question is* – where and when writing begins. What is writing? How can it be identified? What certitude of essence must guide the empirical investigation? Guide it in principle, for it is a necessary fact that empirical investigation quickly activates reflexion upon essence. (1997a, 74-75)

In drawing attention to both the necessary presupposition of an essence – the presupposition of what is – and the impossibility of ever securing that essence, Derrida prompts consideration of what ties these contradictory positions together. The issue for Derrida, in other words, is therefore not one of overcoming the dream of essentialism – with all of its ideals of identity and presence – but the question of how to work otherwise with the necessity of an impossible essence. To put this otherwise, whilst a Foucauldian approach will effectively make visible the multiplicities that coalesce around and throughout the One and Only discursive practice(s) of monotheism, this in itself will not fully deconstruct monotheism given Derrida's contentions that strategies of inversion or subversion are two sides of the same logic. So, for Derrida:

What must occur then is not merely a suppression of all hierarchy, for anarchy only consolidates just as surely the established order of a metaphysical hierarchy; nor is it a simple change or reversal in the terms of any given hierarchy. Rather the *Umdrehung* must be a transformation of the hierarchical structure itself. (1979, 81)

In other words, replacing the One and Only with multiplicity – or even striving to make visible the multiplicity inherent within the One and Only – leaves intact the hierarchical, authoritarian structure of the binary division.²⁶ Such a strategy only reaffirms the place

²⁶ These mark what could be called the two temptations of deconstruction. The first strategy is, as Derrida puts it:

To attempt an exit and a deconstruction without changing terrain, by repeating what is implicit in the founding concepts and the original problematic, by using against the edifice the instruments or stones available in the house, that is, equally, in language. Here, one risks ceaselessly confirming, consolidating, *relifting* (*relever*), at an always more certain depth, that which one allegedly deconstructs. The continuous process of making explicit, moving toward an opening, risks sinking into the autism of the closure. (1982b, 135)

The second is:

To decide to change terrain, in a discontinuous and irruptive fashion, by brutally placing oneself outside, and by affirming an absolute break or difference. Without mentioning all the other

of power in the very attempt to overthrow it. Rather, as Derrida suggests, if one wants to avoid this trap the hierarchical structure itself must be transformed. This informs the logics of deconstruction and supplementarity, and provides the basis for my final experiments with regards to monotheism. That is, although monotheism cannot be extricated from the deconstruction of the logic of the One and Only, ‘deconstruction’ and ‘end’ are not the same things, as Derrida and others have taken pains to stress. As this dissertation makes clear, the deconstruction of the One and Only God opens – ethically – the possibility of different kinds of conceptualising about God and about totality; possibilities that open otherwise towards the God(s) and others that have been overwritten in biblical texts and other discourses of the One and Only. Deconstruction is thus not the end of the story of the logic of the One and Only; far from it. It is, however, the erosion of its façades of totality and unified identity, which is indeed an end of the One and Only as dreamed about by many of the traditional discourses productive of God.

Events and Practices in Focus

This dissertation is thus about a centre (God) and canon/s that cannot hold, about demonstrating and genealogically mapping the irrecusable supplementarity²⁷ that I show to be inextricable from the eventalised canonisations at work within various monotheistic discourses or events. More specifically, I am concerned to show that various of the founding events and functionings of monotheism – each identified as an event or discursive practice in the Foucauldian sense and each mapped genealogically across the context of a chapter – are always already undermined, always already

forms of *trompe-l'oeil* perspective in which such a displacement can be caught, thereby inhabiting more naively and strictly than ever the inside one declares one has deserted, the simple practice of language ceaselessly reinstates the new terrain on the oldest ground. (ibid.)

Both according to Derrida have the same effect: by attempting a complete change of terrain one only reaffirms one's place within the old terrain. The more one tries to escape the dominant discursive practice, the more one finds oneself frustratingly within it. These strategies are considered in more detail in the final three chapters of this dissertation.

²⁷ According to Derrida (1997a), western thinking is characterised by the logic of supplementation, which encompasses and practices two apparently contradictory ideas. From one perspective, a supplement serves to enhance the presence of something that is already complete and self-sufficient. Thus, writing is the supplement of speech, and Eve was the supplement of Adam. But simultaneously, according to Derrida, the Western idea of the supplement has within it the idea that a thing that has a supplement cannot be truly complete in itself. If it were complete without the supplement, it should not need, or long for, the supplement. The fact that a thing can be added-to to make it even more ‘present’ or ‘whole’ means that there is a hole and the supplement can fill that hole. From this perspective, the supplement does not enhance something's presence, but rather underscores its absence. While supplementarity is traced throughout each chapter, it is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven and utilised in Chapter Eight.

deconstructed. This dissertation is thus both a genealogy and a multifaceted deconstruction of the Hebrew Bible and of monotheism, as well as of the continuing presence of monotheism in the problematics of contemporary and seemingly secular thought. In particular, I use the metaphor of ‘palimpsest’ to denote the layered relations of the various events, perspectives and practices drawn upon and mapped so to show the instabilities of traditional theo-political renderings of biblical texts, using palimpsest in the sense of later writing being superimposed on semi-effaced earlier writings. Not out of place in the ancient Near Eastern world of manuscripts and literature, ideas of palimpsest or of what has become known as *sous rature* also describe a strategic philosophical device developed by Martin Heidegger.²⁸ Usually translated as ‘under erasure’, *sous rature* involves the crossing out of a word within a text but allowing it to remain legible and in place. It marks a layering effect in other words, showing how a word or term or idea can remain but be overlaid, almost (but not quite) to the point of invisibility.²⁹ Also used extensively by Derrida in his delineation of deconstruction, *sous rature* signifies that a word is inadequate yet necessary; that a particular signifier is not wholly suitable for the concept it represents, but must be used as the constraints of our language offer nothing better. In deconstruction, *sous rature* has been described as

²⁸ The practice of placing words or terms under erasure first appeared in Heidegger’s work *The Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics* (1995) and subsequently in a letter to Ernst Jünger in 1956 titled “The Question of Being” (*Zur Seinsfrage*), in which Heidegger seeks to define nihilism (see Spivak 1997, xiv). During the course of the letter, Heidegger also begins to speculate about the problematic nature of defining anything, let alone words. In particular, the meaning of the term ‘Being’ is contested and Heidegger crosses out the word, but lets both the deletion and the word remain. “Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible” (Spivak 1997, xiv). According to the Heideggerian model, erasure expressed the problem of presence and absence of meaning in language. Heidegger was concerned with trying to return the absent meaning to the present meaning and the placing of a word or term under erasure “simultaneously recognized and questioned the term’s meaning and accepted use” (Taylor and Winkquist 2001, 113). Derrida adopted this technique and further explored the implications of Heidegger’s erasure and its application in the wider setting of deconstructive literary theory. Derrida extended the problem of presence and absence to include the notion that erasure does not mark a lost presence, rather the potential impossibility of presence altogether – in other words, the potential impossibility of univocity of meaning ever having been attached to the word in the first place. Ultimately, Derrida argued, it was not just the particular signs that were placed under erasure, but the whole system of signification (*ibid.*).

²⁹ The practices of *sous rature* as well as palimpsests thus remind us that the hidden is never completely erased. Here is E. S. Buchanan’s account of the *Gospel of St. John from the Huntingdon Palimpsest* in 1918:

It was nearly a year before I found out its hidden words, for they had been washed out by an acid bath, and the Gospel text which we for many centuries have known was then written over the washed out words. By perseverance and long previous experience with Palimpsests, I was able to read the hidden writing by the indentations which were made by the steel pen on the surface of the vellum, and which remained when the ink was removed. So well had the work of obliterating almost all trace of the writing of early centuries been done that neither the seller nor the buyer of the MS. was aware that it was a Palimpsest. (1918, vii)

These issues concerning the non-absoluteness of the hidden are returned to throughout this dissertation, but particularly so in Chapter Seven.

the typographical expression that seeks to identify sites within texts where key terms and concepts may be paradoxical or self-undermining, rendering their meaning undecidable (Taylor and Winqvist 2001, 113; Belsey 2002, 116). In this dissertation, demonstrated genealogically, ‘God’ denotes one such site.

Within this framework of the eventalised palimpsest and of *sous rature*, there are, as noted, two further arguments in play, both of which are concurrently traced in my mapping of this genealogy and (as) deconstruction of the events comprising the monotheistic construal of God and the Hebrew Bible. The first is that the theory and practice of monotheism across all its events bases itself on and expresses an operation of presencing. As a particular kind of metaphysical operation used to order reality and prioritise language, presencing exerts power and accords privilege. While order and priority are arguably necessary constructs within human consciousness,³⁰ presencing is also indicative of sites of exclusion and marginalisation, instances of injustice that (should be able to) seek redress. For this dissertation, presencing work is always indicative of aporias and resistances, of ‘palimpsestuous’ sites, and events always already under deconstruction. The second argument, drawing on the first, is that claims to monotheism always already, and under their own terms (that is, under their own logic), deconstruct themselves by showing that the presence claimed by such structures, by metaphysical grounding, is not and cannot be achieved. It is the combination of these two arguments that allows me to demonstrate that the diverse events, texts and traditions (and logics) which claim to be monotheistic and which comprise monotheism are interestingly also the deconstruction of monotheism; that the One and Only God exceeds one-ness and is always more than one. This is a core gesture of this dissertation, itself an experiment in showing through detailed engagements with several of the core discursive practices or events of monotheism that a monotheistic logic is itself always already adaptive, playful and undecidable rather than fixed. Such fracturing and dissemination of the One (one who is more than one) also suggests that claims to the historical hegemony of a particular understanding of ‘God’ and the ‘divine’ can only be culturally unstable, philosophically vulnerable, ethically unreliable, and politically volatile.

³⁰ The conceptual scheme behind this claim is addressed in Chapter Five, in the discussion on the intellectual crises informing ‘death of God’ thinking.

Structuring a Monotheistic Genealogy

As mentioned earlier, the first seven chapters of this dissertation are genealogical in structure, with each one examining and mapping an event for and of monotheism which operates as “a practice that has its own forms of sequence and succession” (Foucault 1991a, 169), and that systematically forms and also regulates the object – monotheism – of which it speaks. Specifically, the first four chapters map four of the interlaced theopolitical and historical discursive practices that underpin and comprise the conventionally accepted problematic of the monotheistic project, and identify thereby some of the irrecusable aporias – impasses, points of unremitting resistance and supplementarity – that trouble these practices. These discursive practices – each presented by its proponents as integral to and exemplary of the monotheistic event – mark key layers of the palimpsest, albeit ones that are themselves palimpsestous. They range from, first, the processes of biblical canonisation; second, the accounting for the Bible-as-history; third, the monotheistic project as spelt out in the biblical texts themselves; as well as, fourth, the theological accounting for the problem of one-ness.

The first chapter, then, ‘Sealings and Unsealings: Canonisation’, continues from my initial considerations of the role and significance of canonisation and takes Foucault’s advice to foreground and explore points of slippage and the margins. More specifically, it explores what is informing and at stake in the closing and opening of canonised texts and identities. This is carried out through a genealogical examination of the origin and development of the biblical canons of both Judaism and Christianity, an examination focussing in particular on the processes that led to the stabilising of fixed collections (and identities). In tracing the attempts to close off and seal the Bible (and, by extension, its associated constructs of identity), as well as the drives to maintain tradition,³¹ I suggest that such closing of canon is always already a call for its revision, its dis-closure, and argue that canons can never as such function as closed and fixed totalities. Of particular interest in this closure and dis-closure, is the functionality of biblical (meta)commentary, a functionality that is further examined in subsequent chapters.

In Chapter Two, unpacking some of the slippages of canon, the problematic of the Bible as History is the chosen event for genealogical mapping. I thus trace a sequence of the accounts biblical scholarship has given of the emergence of

³¹ These various constructs and drives towards certain identities and traditions will be brought under examination in the following chapters.

monotheism in ancient Israel, showing this ‘history’ to be, however, highly contentious. As this chapter reveals, numerous theories shaped by a variety of scholarly, cultural, and religious investments continue to try to explain monotheism’s origins; many of which display only thinly disguised eagerness that ancient Israel be recognised as the first locus of revelation for the one-ness of divinity. For some scholars of the nineteenth century in particular, the concern has to do with shoring up the position of Western culture and entails the development of a progressive model of monotheism that in turn entails the development toward modern scientific theories of a unified cosmos. For others, the concern is more pietistic,³² centred on the belief that the revelation of divine one-ness and unity is a distinguishing mark and so a special revelation of Judaism (or, by extension, Islam or Christianity).

The third chapter, ‘Text(s) and Tradition(s)’, examines a related and equally intricately interlaced discursive practice. Specifically, it traces several of the biblical and extra-biblical historical and textual narratives that identify and present certain key events in the recorded history of the ancient Near East as vital to the development of ancient Israel’s theo-politics (events also drawn upon by the discursive practices discussed in the previous chapter). As this analysis shows, a number of historical crises – such as the destruction of the Temple, the end of the monarchy, the Babylonian ‘exile’ and ‘return’, and suzerainty to Persia – have been framed as integral to the creation and maintenance of a distinctive monotheist identity as well as being used to actively (re)shape earlier traditions in terms of a monotheistic predilection. This examination of textual and traditional framings of such key events assists me in further delineating the complex and contested ‘development’ of monotheism along a theo-political ‘timeline’, a core part of the genealogy of monotheism, and, more importantly, this chapter foregrounds some of the aporias that show that biblical conceptions of God were always already in flux.

Questions of problematic one-ness continue to be examined in Chapter Four, ‘The Theological (Re)Turn’, where the tradition and core discursive practices of Negative Theology – the *via negativa* – are explored as illustrative of the problematic inherent in attempting to theologically articulate God as the One and Only (as source, ground or centre). Through examining several of the attempts by both NeoPlatonists and Negative Theologians to revitalise thinking about (God as) the One, this chapter makes clear that these traditions, despite all their efforts, are also unable to reconcile or

³² I use pietism here deliberately to draw attention to the exaggerated or affected nature of pious sentiment but not the seventeenth-century movement for the revival of piety in the Lutheran Church.

synthesise the aporias entrenched within totalising systems of thought. This chapter ends by linking this problematic of one-God thinking to the crisis of reason diagnosed by Enlightenment thinkers, an early gesture towards the shift carried out in the next chapters when an examination of ‘death of God’ thinking shows it to be a core strand for later, explicitly deconstructive, discourses of monotheism.

The second part of this dissertation and the mapping of another palimpsestuous layer, tracing more of the consequences of the irrecusable aporias identified in One and Only thinking in the first part, does so by foregrounding the operation of presencing – also known as the “metaphysics of presence” (Derrida 1973, 51) – as a further discursive practice overlaying all those already discussed. This chapter also investigates some of the discursive trajectories opened up by what has been labelled ‘the end of metaphysics’, a development in continental philosophy that was inaugurated in the nineteenth century (the development gestured towards in Chapter Four). Chapter Five, ‘Writing (and) the Dissonance of God(s)’, thus shifts from the *via negativa*’s (failed) attempts to articulate the One and Only to consideration of the ‘death of God’ thinking event initiated and explored by Friedrich Nietzsche and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, both significant contributors to exploring the aporia-ridden functions of language and representations in the articulation of God (and subjectivity). This shift from the traditionally theologically and historically-oriented discourses of monotheism toward the operation of thinking and language, with its concurrent shift in focus to the ‘how’ rather than on the ‘what’, is shown to be not that distant from the classic tradition of negative or apophatic theology, and marks a new set of trajectories in the discursive practice of presencing. As such, Chapter Five traces the problematic of the One and Only theo-logic into (one of) its modern reconfiguration(s) as the problem of the One and the Many.

Chapter Six, ‘Dis-closing and Biblical Discourses’, is concerned to trace the pathway opened up for monotheism by Heidegger’s concept of ontological difference – used to mark the distinction between Being and beings – before turning toward his call for a radical rethinking of Western metaphysics, of onto-theo-logic, both of which are shown to give rise to important consequences for ‘God as centre’ thinking. In particular, eventalising Heidegger’s thinking around onto-theology and his overall critique of the metaphysics of presence is shown to offer productive suggestions to further challenge traditional conceptions of God and move beyond ‘God as centre’ thinking. My engagement with Heidegger specifically brings to the fore one *destruktion* of monotheism by showing that the presence monotheism claims – for instance, the

presence of the creator-God, the presence of the living God, the presence of the Spirit – cannot be achieved. Importantly the pathway I build with Heidegger here in this chapter and the next allows me to propose a significant way forward for thinking a deconstructed ‘God’ (and subsequently, ‘the subject’).³³

Engaging insights developed in Chapter Six, Chapter Seven, ‘Divine Traces’, asks: Is it possible to think of the Hebrew Bible (and its representation of monotheism) as a book not about God (and identity) but about hiding and the trace? Chapter Seven thus maps Derrida’s logic of arche-writing, *différance*, and the trace as a further (re)formulation of monotheism from those set out – historically, theo-politically, theologically, philosophically and textually – in previous chapters, one which further traces the problematic of this question of hiding. The first stage of this comprises an examination of the Derridean logic of *différance* (and play) and the trace, and of how these conceptions can open productive questions regarding God’s constitution. These issues are then explored with particular reference to the formulations of names and naming as set out in Exodus and Deuteronomy, as well as those concerning practices of absence and appeal set out in Exodus 31-34. The second stage is my delineation of the possible relationship between the hidden and the trace that might be discerned in God.

Chapter Eight marks the final turn of my genealogy into deconstructive experiment. As noted previously, Derridean logic always holds to a two-part process. First is to demonstrate the pluralities and multiplicities that inform any and every identity or practice, with such demonstration carried out in this case with the aid of genealogical evental analysis. The second – and the second step marks the explicit refusal to rest in either of deconstruction’s two temptations, both of which maintain the initial structuring logic of monotheism – is to show how the event(s) and practice(s) of monotheism is simultaneously made possible and ruined by its supplementarity. This chapter in particular demonstrates that monotheism’s multiplicities as shown through genealogical analysis are supplementary in the sense ascribed to this idea by Derrida. That is, that these multiplicities (of gods, books, events, palimpsestuous materialities,

³³ As will be shown, the significance for thinking lies in the profound implications for our understanding of a range of crucial signifiers – signifiers which have come to the fore in recent (post 1968) thinking – and which I draw on later in this dissertation. For example, incommensurability, otherness, alterity, singularity, *différance*, and plurality – these signifiers reverberate through much of twentieth-century philosophical and theological thought. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to deal with a critique of the trajectory of the subject and what that might look like; it is, however, not unreasonable to suggest that – and drawing closely from Hegel’s thought here – there have been significant changes in human consciousness and indeed in God’s development over time. Just what changes have occurred and the ‘nature’ of the correlation drawn between the two are also beyond this dissertation and would make an interesting research project later on, particularly in light of work by Quentin Meillassoux (2008) and Catherine Malabou (2012a; 2012b; 2008; 2004).

laws) – as supplements – are always already within the original identity that is being supplemented. That these supplements are always already within the logic of the monotheistic God, making it possible as it tries to deny them, and thus in the end undoing the logic on which it rests. Lastly it remains for me to consider the implications and possibilities of such a genealogical and deconstructive analysis of and experiment in monotheism. Hence the penultimate part of Chapter Eight, ‘Welcoming in the Name of Justice’, reiterates the tensions and heterogeneities previous chapters examined, to finally consider what other possibilities might become visible from my previous problematisings of the conceptions, practices and events of monotheism, God and thinking in terms of totalised covenants and canon. Here I sketch a series of speculations as to what a supplemented and deconstructed monotheism might make possible.

In order to do justice, to acknowledge the gaps and to be responsive to what has been left in the margins, my first speculation is to continue to expand and supplement the covenantal/lawful lenses. Indeed, the refusal to complete and subsume difference into a single narrative, identity or book is a challenge that is explicitly rabbinic, midrashic. The process of ‘*lidrosh*’ (to examine and interpret) is, after all, a just process that can embrace diverse stories, new words, and different relationalities, if pushed to it. The aim of supplementing law with (more) law is to accept the imperative (of justice) to keep on rewriting law to be more lawful, that is further able to move toward a future that remains always to-come. This reading is also deconstructive – a supplement of the law – and also, as such, ethical. The final, and perhaps in some ways most controversial speculation I make in ‘Final Reflections Toward an Open-Ended Future’ regards what I claim is the obligation that this ethic opens up. I name this call to justice ‘a return to exile’ and conclude that the taking up of an exilic stance – the very gesture – might facilitate a move beyond legacies of exclusion and silencing associated with monotheisms and One and Only thinking, and further allow space for a reimagining of covenantal relationship (with others, with world, with the non-human, with God/s).

One final point stands to be made, which is that although these chapters each orient towards and map different discursive practices and arguments in monotheism, they are interlinked in multiple ways, informing and tracing a palimpsestuous relationality. First, as is obvious, they do each orient towards and shed light on the problematic of monotheism, even the latter chapters that engage with thinkers and works that would not themselves claim a monotheistic label. There are also interconnections between chapters due to their (differential) considerations of certain

themes, tropes, events and artefacts. Themes and tensions identified in one chapter will re-emerge and be examined in other configurations in subsequent chapters, demonstrating the constitutive inter-relationality of the events and accounts comprising the broader discursive problematic of monotheism. Finally, there is also an external interlinking mechanism insofar as these chapters also trace my continued genealogical (and deconstructive) engagements with the multiplicity of texts, events, stories and discursive practices that comprise and deconstruct the Hebrew Bible, the biblical canon, and God and thinking. It is this palimpsestuous complexity of relations, then, that marks my orienting focus as I begin my questionings of origin despite the temptations and risks of closure; that orients my beginning, now, in the middle of canon.

Chapter One

Sealings and Unsealings: Canonisation

Canons as Sealing

As was noted in my Introduction, any examination of the origin and development of the biblical canons of both Judaism and Christianity is essentially about the processes that led to the stabilising of fixed collections of writings as undergirding the core of beliefs, mission activity¹ and religious practices of those communities. Examination of these processes, of course, also informs my genealogical investigations of monotheism, insofar as such examination aims to make visible a range of what Foucault has called singularities, those points or events which can facilitate the disruption and collapse of a seemingly coherent and consistent discourse. The corollary of this canon formation, as discussed in Chapter Three in particular, is the belief that the writings which make up those collections have their origin in God; that is, that they are inspired by God and consequently authoritative for worship, instruction in core beliefs, and religious and practical conduct. While the definition of a biblical canon has more to do with the end of a process – that is, with a fixed list of sacred scriptures – the authority attributed to those writings was recognised much earlier when they were in a more fluid stage of development and were more open to adaptation or change to meet the needs of the religious community – a point that becomes increasingly important in this chapter. Many factors played a role in the complex history of the literary formation of the biblical canon, including the origin of the notion of sacred literature, the processes that led to the recognition of that literature, and the final fixing of a closed collection of sacred literature.

¹ I use ‘mission’ here and elsewhere through this chapter to designate various vocations, callings and assignments given to or expected from people in religious organisations. This is language typically associated with Christian mission although not exclusively. For example, there is the serving of a mission (proselytizing or humanitarian) by youth of the Church of Latter Day Saints (two years full-time), or with a range of Jewish Federations and youth programs that call young Jewish adults to participate in education, leadership and social initiatives and agencies in building a better Jewish community in Israel and throughout the world (World Jewish Congress 2014), and in the World Muslim Congress calls to the furtherance of Muslim teaching and culture within religious pluralism and pluralistic societies (World Muslim Congress 2012).

There is little agreement among scholars as to when this ‘canonical activity’ began, where it began, and in particular when it was completed. Resolving such problems is made more difficult by the fact that there are no discussions of the origins, development, and recognition of biblical canons in antiquity. By all appearances, this was an undetermined process throughout much of its development. Most information on the matter is tenuous, and is generally drawn from an investigation of a limited but familiar collection of ancient texts. For example, there is no evidence from the time of Jesus that either the Jews or the followers of Jesus were even remotely interested in the notion of a closed collection of sacred scriptures. The textual form of the Scriptures was also of little serious consideration in the early stages of the canonical processes, although at various times some texts and translations did receive widespread if not universal acceptance in the Jewish and Christian communities. Most early churches, for example, unofficially adopted the Septuagint (LXX), or Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, as its divinely inspired version, and the Jews later opted for the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible, although the earliest complete witness to that text dates from 1008 CE. ‘Septuagint’ originally referred only to the translation of the Pentateuch, a point made forcefully, first by the author of the *Letter of Aristeas*² (§§3-5, 19, 30, etc., in Charles 1964; Penner and Scott 2006; Barrett 1987, 296-98), who was the first to call the translation a ‘bible’ (§316), but also by Jerome in the fifth century in the introduction to his *Hebraica Questiones in Libro Geneseos* (Jerome 1995, 1.1). The translation gradually expanded to include all of the books of the Jewish Scriptures, including several that are not part of the Masoretic tradition (and which are often called ‘apocryphal’ or ‘deutero-canonical’ in the Christian tradition). It was this Greek version – the Septuagint – that was used to translate the Bible into various languages.³

² The *Letter of Aristeas* is a Hellenistic work of the second century CE that deals primarily with the reason the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, also called the Septuagint, was created, as well as the people and processes involved. Modern scholars commonly regard the *Letter of Aristeas* as Jewish apologetics. For example, Bruce Metzger writes: “Most scholars who have analysed the letter conclude that the author cannot have been the man he represented himself to be but was a Jew who wrote a fictitious account in order to enhance the importance of the Hebrew Scriptures by suggesting that a pagan king had recognised their significance and therefore arranged for their translation into Greek” (2001, 15).

³ Since the Protestant Reformation, Bible translations for many languages have been made. The Bible continues to be translated to new languages, largely by Christian organisations such as Wycliffe Bible Translators, New Tribes Mission and Bible Societies. For example, as of 2017 and of the approximately 7000 languages spoken in the world today, there are 2584 new translations currently in progress, and 3312 languages with a translation of the Christian Testament (Wycliffe Global Alliance 2017). Additionally, the advent of desktop publishing in the mid-1980s, the development of the Biblical software industry, and new technological innovations have helped to rapidly translate, correlate, catalogue and disseminate the Bible worldwide. I am uncertain whether the more recent development of mobile technologies – and the number of Bible related apps released and in development – would make Martin Luther pleased at the accessibility and dissemination of ‘Scripture’, or whether a search for ‘Bible Apps’ on the iTunes Store would make him ill with choice.

The relationship between canon formation and textual or translation considerations has resurfaced recently as an important issue for the Christian Church, but was not significant throughout most of its history with no certain decisions made on these matters in the Patristic Period (ca. second to sixth centuries CE). The differences in the manuscripts that survive from antiquity, as well as in the variety of translations of biblical literature, show that the church had little concern for such matters throughout most of its history. Furthermore, while most scholars who produce critical commentaries today focus at least minimally on the history of the text of biblical books (a focus also considered in the next chapter), they seldom emphasise the significance of this for determining a canonical text, that is, an authoritative text for the church. Historically, the most common assumption has been that the earliest text of the Bible is more authoritative, but recently that view has been challenged, and many textual scholars no longer believe that an original text is recoverable (McDonald 2006a, 778).

Given these points, the following discussion examines the notion of canon in antiquity and its application to the writings that eventually received canonical recognition in the Jewish and Christian communities of faith. The investigation of the Hebrew Bible and the ‘First’ or ‘Old’ Testament of the Church, as will become clear, are inextricably bound together. The lack of agreement in antiquity on the definition of a biblical canon, as well as the books that comprise it, and the inconsistency in the use of terms to describe it and its processes, make any investigation of the origins and stabilisation of the Bible more difficult, as also noted in the following chapters. More importantly, however, like the push to find an originary point or beginning, or a totalising theory of everything (such as monotheism), could looking for a stable and original biblical text or canon be the wrong kind of question to pursue? Could it be a distraction from reconfiguring the text in a different light? This may be so, and yet, as noted in the Introduction to this dissertation, the only starting points are always in the middle of an issue, and, in this instance, this is with the prevalent assumption that there are biblical canons. This examination hence begins with a focus on the context of this canon’s formation through scribal work, an issue it also circles back to, and then proceeds to what can be discerned in ancient sources. Such an examination thus itself exemplifies an attempt to recover a sensibility for the background of the biblical texts, which in turn might work to draw our attention to those Foucaultian singularities or “marginal practices” which mark points and practices that draw their intelligibility from different background understandings than those considered normative (Dreyfus 1993,

302).⁴ The retrieval of such a sensibility, in other words, might also redraw our attention to the conceptual parameters of intelligibility, to practices of concealment and unconcealment, and to what remains hidden or exercised in canon. These are all issues fundamental for the forthcoming chapters.

Inscribing

Scribes in the ancient world were highly esteemed, and were awarded a significant sacred status in the Jewish community. What they wrote was considered very important, even though much of it was simply copying what others had said (Bar-Ilan 1990). Indeed, most of what was written was deemed important, and referring to it as “it is written” came to signify its divine authority (P. Davies 2002, 42-44). The concept ‘fulfill’ and its various forms (‘fulfilled’ or ‘as it is fulfilled’) also came to designate the authority and sacredness of ancient literature. All revelatory material, for example, was given special consideration: when prophets spoke, they were thought to convey the word and will of God. If they wrote down their prophecies, these writings took on the status of divine authority within the religious community. If one believed that an earlier prophecy had been fulfilled in subsequent events, the prophecy was thereby validated, and its divine origin affirmed. Prophecy-fulfillment motifs are frequently found in biblical literature (as they are throughout other ancient Near Eastern literature),⁵ and were received as integral to authoritative sacred writings among Jews and Christians. Hence, in the New Testament, as well as in the early Christian communities, various designations were in use to emphasise the sacredness of the body of literature that is now called the Old Testament: “it is written”, “the writings say”, “the scripture says”, or “as the scripture says” (Metzger 1987, 289-95).

Among the world’s religious traditions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have defined themselves and their mission in terms of sacred texts. The development of a collection of Scriptures in these traditions appears to have come from a common belief in the notion of a ‘heavenly book’ that contains both divine knowledge and decrees from God. This heavenly book generally includes wisdom, destinies (or laws), a book of works, and a book of life (Graham 1993, 49-50). This notion of a heavenly book goes back to ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, where the heavenly book indicated the future

⁴ I further consider Dreyfus’ ‘marginal practices’ in Chapter Six.

⁵ For elaboration, see, for instance, Moshe Weinfield’s (1977) “Ancient Near Eastern patterns in Prophetic literature”.

plans of God – and importantly for those regulating texts and identities – the destinies of human beings.⁶ An example of this metaphysical framework can be found in Psalm 139: “My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed” (Ps 139:15-16).⁷ This notion is also found in Revelation 5:1, 3, and in the description of the opening of a book in 6:1-17 and 8:1-10: 11. In Revelation 20 books are opened before the great white throne of God in heaven, and “another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books ... and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:12, 15). According to Exodus 32:33, sinners will be blotted out of God’s book. The same notion of a heavenly book lies behind Paul’s assertion about Clement and the rest of his colleagues in ministry, “whose names are in the book of life” (Phil 4:3).

This belief gave rise to the notion that divine knowledge and heavenly decrees are contained in a divine book that is symbolised in written scriptures (Graham 1993, 50-51). In the Qur’an, for example, reference is made to a divine book of destinies in which “no misfortune strikes on earth or in yourselves without its being [written] in a Book before we cause it to be. Truly, that is easy for God” (*Surah 57.22* in Graham 1993, 50). Long before the notion of a biblical canon, then, the Law was believed to have come directly from God. Moses proclaimed the words and ordinances of God (Ex 24:3), and was commissioned by God to write them down (Ex 34:4, 27). It was believed that God was the writer of the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments (Ex 34:1; Deut 4:13; 10:4).⁸ The Jews came to believe that the Law of God was written and preserved in sacred writings, and this belief played an important role in the development of their notion of a revealed and authoritative scripture.

Although the belief in divinely inspired writings was widespread in Israel in late antiquity and also in early Christianity, what each group believed was scripture is not always clear. The basic properties of ‘Scripture’, both for ancient Judaism and Christianity, appear to have included at least four essential ingredients. Generally

⁶ For a background discussion and collection of ancient Near Eastern texts and processes of canonisation see Hallo and Younger’s (2003) *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*. See especially their Introduction on ancient Near Eastern texts and their relevance for biblical exegesis (xxiii-xxviii). Rivka Ulmer (2009) discusses the significance of Egypt in Rabbinic texts in *Egyptian Cultural Icons in Midrash*.

⁷ As is conventional, I reference biblical citations by book name, chapter number and verse number.

⁸ These issues of divine authorship are explored in detail in later chapters, particularly in Chapters Seven and Eight.

speaking, Scripture is a) written document believed to have b) divine origin that c) communicates the will and truth of God for a believing community, and d) provides a source of regulations for the corporate and individual life of that community. Hence, when a particular writing was acknowledged by a religious community to be divinely inspired and authoritative, it was eventually elevated to the status of Scripture, even if the writing was not yet called ‘Scripture’ and even if that status was only temporary.⁹ There was, however, little discussion in the early church of such matters, and in the first two centuries there was only limited agreement as to which books were acknowledged as Scripture.

Indeed, even though ancient writers often cited written texts, this does not necessarily mean that they or their readers viewed them as sacred and inviolable scriptures. Likewise, when an ancient teacher cites a particular text as scripture, one cannot conclude that all teachers of that time and place considered that writing sacred. For example, Paul reportedly cited several non-biblical sources in his speaking and writings (Acts 17:28, Epimenides and Aratus; cf. Titus 1.12, Epimenides), but it cannot be concluded that he cited them *as* scripture. Also, even though Irenaeus argued for a fourfold gospel collection, those four and no more, after him Bishop Serapion of Antioch initially allowed the *Gospel of Peter* to be read in the churches. It was only later, after examining its theological contents, that he reversed his position on the matter. Likewise, as late as the mid-fourth century, Athanasius published his twenty-seven-book list of the writings of the New Testament in his *39th Festal Letter*, but it was not universally accepted in the rest of the Roman Empire, or even in Egypt itself in his generation (Athanasius 1987).¹⁰ Widespread approval took much longer. Just because well-known church teachers cited ancient texts, it cannot be concluded that such writings were a part of their biblical canons.

The Christian Church inherited its collection of Scriptures from first-century Judaism before its separation from the synagogue. This was a collection largely, but not completely, formed before the time of Jesus, and included the Law and the Prophets, as well as an imprecise collection of other writings. It could be that these other writings were fewer than, the same as, or even more than those in the current Hebrew Scriptures.

⁹ For example, see the Loeb Classical Library (LCL) for *1 Clement*, *Letters of Ignatius* (Erhman, 2004a). The *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, and *Eldad and Modad* appears in the *Shepherd of Hermas* Visions 2.3.4 as a fragment and in *1 Clement* 8.4 (Erhman 2004b). All references to the early Christian Church are drawn from the LCL unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁰ In this letter Athanasius (1987) lists the books of the Old Testament as twenty-two, in accordance with Jewish tradition. To the books of the Tanakh he adds the Book of Baruch, and the Letter of Jeremiah, but he excludes the Book of Esther.

The early Christians apparently accepted several ‘apocryphal’ writings as ‘scripture’, since they cited them as such in the second and third centuries, and several of these writings appear in various biblical manuscripts in the fourth and fifth centuries as well as in various canonical lists from the same time (McDonald 1995, 108-18, 268-73). The variety in those collections diminished in time, but some diversity was present for several centuries – indeed, throughout church history. Had there been any understanding in the early church that Jesus had received and passed on to his disciples a fixed biblical canon, it is unthinkable that the early church would have considered producing another ‘Testament’ of sacred writings or receiving as sacred any books that Jesus had rejected. The development of a ‘New’ Testament in the last third of the second century CE is evidence that the church was not born with a fixed biblical canon in its hands, as some allege. How could a new collection emerge if there was already a fixed biblical canon widely acknowledged?

Canons in Antiquity

In terms of tracing the fixing of the canon, Christians in the fourth century made use of a familiar Greek term, ‘canon’ to describe a closed collection of sacred scriptures. Originally the word referred to a measuring instrument, a standard to follow, and eventually a rule or guide. In the New Testament, *kanōn* is found only in Paul’s letters where he speaks of guidelines established by God, the limits of Paul’s ministry and the boundaries of another’s ministry (2 Cor 10:13, 15, 16), and once as the standard or norm of true faith (Gal 6:16). Later, Clement of Rome uses the term in reference to the Church’s revealed truth, that is “the rule of our traditions” (1 Clement 7.2). Similarly, for Irenaeus, ‘canon’ refers to the essence or core of Christian doctrine. Irenaeus contends that a true believer retains “unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism” (*Against Heresies* 1.9.4). Eusebius of Caesarea indicates that Clement of Alexandria spoke of an “ecclesiastical canon” or “body of truth” (*Ecclesiastical History* 6.13.3). The word was also common in Jewish writings; for example, Josephus refers to Josiah’s ascension to the throne (2 Kgs 22:1; 2 Chr 34:1) and says that he used King David “as a pattern and rule of his whole manner of life” (Jewish Antiquities 10.49; see also *Against Apion* 2.174; Philo *Legum Allegoriae* 3. 233; and 4 Maccabees 7:21).

Athanasius was the first to use *kanōn* in reference to a fixed collection of sacred books, and also to identify the twenty-seven books that eventually made up the New Testament. In his *39th Festal Letter* of 367 CE (see Athanasius 1987), he also uses a verbal form of *kanōn* (*kanonizomenon* or ‘canonised’) to refer to a body of sacred scriptures. Following Athanasius, a closed list, or fixed collection, of sacred scriptures came to be referred to as a biblical ‘canon’. Earlier (325 CE), Eusebius describes sacred books in the church as ‘covenanted’ (*endiathēkē*, literally ‘encovenanted’) writings (Ecclesiastical History 3.25.6), or ‘recognised’ (*homologoumenon*) (ibid. 6. 25. 3). The word he used for a list of sacred books is ‘catalogue’ (*katalogos*) (ibid. 3.25.6; 4.26.13). When he uses the term *kanon*, he generally focuses on the Church’s rule of faith. Of the ten instances of this word in his writings, two are candidates for referring to an exclusive list of sacred scriptures (ibid. 5.28.13 and 6.25.3). Eusebius thus provides the first datable lists of recognised canonical books in the Church (ibid. 3.25.1-7), and he presents what he claims was Origen’s collection of scriptures as follows, saying “in the first of his [Commentaries] on the Gospel according to Matthew, defending the canon of the Church (*ton ekklesiastikon fulattōn kanona*), he gives his testimony that he knows only four Gospels” (ibid. 6.25.3). The only question here is whether the “canon of the Church” refers to the rule of faith (teachings) or to a body of sacred Christian literature, a catalogue. Eusebius cites Origen’s “encovenanted books” (*endiathēkous biblous*) as a collection of Christian scriptures (ibid. 6.25.1).¹¹

The process of canonisation for the Judaic canon clearly had a much earlier beginning than the Christian canon but the regulatory function of the process – the legitimation and regulation of sacred texts was similar. In time, the prophetic writings became known as the *Tanakh* (a term derived from the first Hebrew letter of each division of the Hebrew Bible: *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, *Ketuvim* for TaNaKh), and by the end of the second century Christians began calling them their ‘Old Testament Scriptures’. At the end of that process, the writings that made up those collections were looked upon as sacred and inviolable, and they were placed in a fixed sacred collection called the Holy Scriptures. In the early and fluid stages of development, whilst the writings were often changed or dropped out of use in churches and synagogues, they nevertheless had

¹¹ The writings of the prophets became authoritative both for the Jews and later for the Christians, but initially those writings, and even their textual forms, were not yet fixed or inviolable. Early on they were welcomed as divinely inspired messages from God, but for centuries there was considerable freedom in the church to alter those writings. A Christian Testament example of altering an inspired text is found in the quotation of Psalms 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8.

an impact on the life, worship, conduct, and mission of these two communities of faith, if even for a short time.

These distinctions between scripture and canon, as well as the various processes or stages of canonical development, have been variously represented in recent scholarship (see, e.g., Sanders 1987; Sheppard 1987; Ulrich 2002; 1999). Although it is not unusual for scholars, theologians and politicians today to speak of ‘canon’ in reference to the early recognition of the authority, value and priority of the biblical writings, such uses as shown did not exist in the ancient church until the fourth century CE. At the beginning of the process, one can only speak of a biblical canon anachronistically, and it is difficult to find appropriate vocabulary to identify the processes of canonisation. This is because the ancient religious communities showed little interest in biblical canons as we have come to understand them, and even less in telling the story that led to the final fixing of their biblical canons. It is probably better to speak of a canonical ‘process’ or ‘processes’ at these early stages (Ulrich 1999). The following is a brief survey of the processes that led to the recognition and the apparent stabilisation of the Judaic and Christian Scriptures.

Canonical Processes

As noted earlier, the primary function of canon in a community of faith is to aid that community in its own self-definition (who are we) and its guidelines for living (what we are to do) and the order of its beliefs and hopes (what we are to believe). Those traditions that eventually became canon for ‘ancient Israel’¹² also empowered that community for life; that is, they gave hope even in hopeless situations (the Exile) and brought life to the remnant of the nation of Israel. The literature that spoke to the needs of one generation, but was unable to be interpreted or adapted to meet the needs of another, simply did not survive in Judaism or Christianity.¹³ The adaptability of a story ultimately led to its canonicity, and this became a primary characteristic of canonical material. The stabilisation of the biblical text came later in the canonical process,

¹² Recall Philip R. Davies’s suspicion of the use of ‘ancient Israel’ and ‘biblical Israel’ (P. Davies 1992, 11). Also refer to my Introduction 19-20.

¹³ There are several books mentioned in the Old Testament that did not survive antiquity (2 Sam 1, 18; 1 Kgs 11, 41; 14:19, 29; 15:7, 23, 31; 16:5, 14, 20, 27; 22:39, 45; 2 Kgs 1: 18; 8:23; 10:34; 12:19; 13:8, 12; 14:15, 18, 28; 15:6, 11, 15, 21, 26, 31, 36; 16:19; 20:20; 21:17; 21:25; 23:28; 24:5; 1 Chr 27:24; 2 Chr 20:34; 33:18; Ezra 4:15; Neh 12:23). These are listed more completely in McDonald (2006b) *The Biblical Canon: Its Origins, Transmissions, and Authority*.

although the church as a whole never opted for any particular text of the biblical scriptures.

The survivability of the ancient scriptures thus had much to do with their ability to be interpreted afresh in new communities and new circumstances. New interpretations were the product of a hermeneutics that searched for relevance and meaning in this literature in ever new circumstances. Ancient recognition of the divine authority of written documents was hence accompanied by the repetition of a story in believing communities, specifically the telling of that story in a variety of contexts so as to meet the needs of the community of faith and offer it hope (adaptability). The story, then, that is at the heart of the earliest Jewish biblical canon is about a people who migrated from Egypt to Canaan under the guidance and protection of Yahweh, who rescued them from bondage and brought them to their promised land. Other elements were added to this story, both at its beginning (the Genesis tradition) and at its ending (the prophetic tradition, wisdom literature, and the history of the fall of the nation). The earliest story did not include a Decalogue or other lists of divine commandments, but consisted essentially in telling the story of God's calling the Israelites to a foreign land and preserving them through divine acts. The people responded to these acts by recognising Yahweh as the one true God of Israel and accepting God's call to be a holy nation.¹⁴

After the exile of Israel to Babylon, the Judahites reconsidered their story from the perspective of the classical prophets whose witness to that story gave them life and hope. In the message from Ezekiel, for example, the people could, through the faithfulness of Yahweh, look forward to the resurrection of the nation following its death (Ezek 36-7). In the exilic sojourn, Ezekiel echoed the vision of Jeremiah, who spoke of the reforming of the nation (Jer 18:1-11). After the Judahites had lost land, national leaders, temple, and cult in the terrible destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, unlike other nations before and after them, they did not simply merge with other nations, acknowledge other gods, and become extinct as a people who served Yahweh. Instead, the cultural memory of Israel was reborn. The only thing that remained that had not been destroyed, which was also commonly available, adaptable, and transportable, was the story of God's redemption that preserved Israel from extinction. That story was transported to Babylon, and there it was adapted to the new circumstances of the Jewish

¹⁴ There are many examples of this primal story in the Old Testament Scriptures (here, in the context of discussing Christian Scripture), especially in the Prophets (Amos 2:9-11; 3:1-2; 4:10-11; 5:25; 9:7, 11; cf. also Deut 26:5-9 and Josh 24), and in the Christian Testament, where it continued to serve in establishing the true identity of God's people (Acts 7:2-53; 1 Cor 10:1-11; Heb 3:5-19).

people in captivity, and there its faith and hope were reconfigured (Sanders 1987, 18-19).

Subsequent biblical writings reject the belief that the revelation and will of God were disclosed not only in the mighty acts of God through which Yahweh interceded in human history (e.g. in the exodus), but also in written materials (as in the tablets of stone that contained the Ten Commandments) and subsequently in the Pentateuch, where the writing down of God's word was an important mark of God's revelation (Ex 24:12; 31:8; 32:15, 32; 34:1; Deut 4:2, 13; 8:11; etc.). Just as Moses wrote down the commandments of the Lord (Ex 24:4; 34:27), so also did Joshua (24:26) and Samuel (1 Sam 10:25). In the book of Deuteronomy, the king was called upon to write down for himself a copy of the Law of God for reading all the days of his life, to remind him of the statutes of God and to be humble in his dealings with his people (Deut 17:18-20). The people were also called upon to write the words of God on their doorposts (Deut 6:9; 11:20). The writers of the Old Testament literature do not generally reckon with a written scripture as an acknowledged authoritative feature in the life of Israel, except toward the end of that period, as found in the reforms of Josiah (cf. 2 Kgs 18:20a with 22:3-13; cf. Mal 4:4) at approximately 622-621 BCE. Those prophets who earlier said 'Thus says the Lord', were not speaking on the basis of an already existing text, but rather from their understanding of the will of God that came to them by revelation. Almost nothing in the Hebrew Bible suggests that there were sacred scriptures to turn to when guidance was needed. Neither David nor Solomon nor Hezekiah spoke about sacred books that were current and normative in the life of Israel. Individuals related to God more through persons (priests and prophets) and institutions (tabernacle and temple) than through sacred writings, except toward the end of the Old Testament period. While it is true that some of the Psalms – especially 19 and 119 – emphasise meditation on the word, law, precepts, and statutes of God, most do not date before the time of Josiah's finding of the book of the Law (in all likelihood, an early form of Deuteronomy) in 621 BCE.¹⁵ This is not to suggest that sacred religious traditions that functioned in an authoritative manner in the life and worship of the ancient Jewish people did not exist earlier. No religious community exists without rule or authority or a sacred tradition, regardless of whether it is expressed in scriptures, creeds, liturgies, or

¹⁵ See my note on Josiah and the Deuteronomic Reformers in Chapter Three (106n27). In 2 Kgs 22-23, the chief priest Hilkiah proclaims "I have found the Book of the Law [*sepher hattôrâ*] in the House of Yahweh". Chapters Seven and Eight argue that instances of loss and (re)discovery within biblical texts – such as the example of the (re)discovery of the (lost) Book of the Law – draw attention to a deconstruction always already at work within the text when the once familiar text can be seen in a new light.

oral traditions, and, by its nature, that which is divinely inspired can be adapted to new circumstances of life or it ceases to be canonical.

At what point was the religion of Israel governed by or built upon the Law or any written authority? It was probably not much before the reforms of Josiah (2 Kgs 23:1-25; 2 Chr 34-5), but certainly no later than the reforms of Ezra one or more centuries later when the book of the Law was read to the people (Neh 8:1-8; 9:1-3; cf. Ezra 7:6, 10, 14; 9:11-12). The Deuteronomic movement in Israel in the seventh to sixth centuries BCE no doubt played a major role in effecting that change. This can be seen not only in the admonition to obey the commandments of Yahweh, but also the warning against adding to them or taking away from them (Deut 4: 2). When what was written down in Israel was later translated and explained to the people as having normative value in the life of their community (Neh 8:8-11), the notion of scripture was present in Judaism. During the Exile a remnant of Judeans¹⁶ remembered the message of the prophets who had ‘accurately predicted’ what would happen to the nation. As the truthfulness of the prophets’ message of warning and judgment was remembered, that remnant also recognised a message of hope that allowed Israel to survive the terrible judgments that had been inflicted upon them in their captivity. These Judeans accepted the message of the prophets, took responsibility for their failure as a nation, and accepted their captivity and destruction as judgment from Yahweh for their own misdeeds. The Judean remnant remembered and repeated this message. Earlier, the pre-exilic prophets, who had warned their nation of the consequences of their disregard for their covenant with God, had been accused of being “madmen, unpatriotic, blasphemous, seditious, and traitorous” (Jer 29:26), but now the prophets were remembered because it was written that what they had predicted actually came to pass. The remnant believed that the core of this prophetic message was contained in the Torah. This message was eventually expanded to include both the Former and then the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve) and finally the Writings (Ezra-Nehemiah, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Daniel, and 1 and 2 Chronicles). As the Judeans returned to Yehud from exile in Babylon, their authoritative writings were primarily the laws of Moses, but soon this included the

¹⁶ A shift in language occurs with Judahites and Judeans across the last few pages – recalling the problematics of the identity of ‘Israel’ discussed earlier with reference to the work of P. Davies – the Kingdom of Judah resulted from the collapse of the united monarchy of the Kingdom of Israel (1020 – c. 930 BCE) after the northern tribes refused to accept Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, as their king. The result is a divided northern Kingdom of Israel (one of the problematic ‘Israelites’) and southern Kingdom of Judah (Judahites or members of the southern territories). ‘Judeans’ refer to the post-exilic group that resided in the Persian province of Judea.

whole of the Torah and subsequently the Prophets also (c.100 CE). In the repetition of this story within context (a feature of canon), the remnant of Israel discovered life and hope.

The fluidity of the transmission of this story, and its adaptability through the genius of hermeneutics, continued well into the time of Jesus when the lack of a fixed or stabilised tradition contributed to the existence of the variety of sects within Judaism (Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Samaritans and Christians) that flourished in the first century CE. After the destruction of the Temple and its cultus in 70 CE, and following the failure of the messianic movement in the Bar Kokhba rebellion of 132-135 CE, rabbinic Judaism, early Christianity, and a small band of Samaritans were the only brands of Judaism that survived these traumatic events.¹⁷ The first of these began to restrict its sacred writings to a time when it believed that the spirit of prophecy had existed in Israel (from Moses to Ezra), and all other books were excluded, even though several other books, “Wisdom of Solomon” and “Sirach”, continued to be read by pious Jews for several centuries.¹⁸ By the end of the first century CE, the biblical canon of the Jews began to reflect the twenty-two or twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible. As noted, this long and complicated process began with a fluid and adaptable story in the pre-exilic period that was finally fixed for the Jews in the fourth through the sixth centuries CE.

This process was completed for the Christians at roughly the same time, but for completely different reasons and with a different collection and ordering of books. The Hebrew Bible concludes with Chronicles telling the story of the remnant of Jews returning from bondage in Babylon to their homeland to rebuild their land, homes, and

¹⁷ The Bar Kokhba revolt against the Roman Empire established an independent Jewish state which the leader of the revolt Simon bar Kokhba ruled for three years as *Nasi* (‘Prince’). The Romans conquered the Jewish state in 135 CE following a two and a half year war. Originally named Simon bar Kosevah (or possibly Bar Koseva or Ben Koseva), the Jewish sage Rabbi Akiva postulated that Simon could be the Jewish messiah, and gave him the surname ‘Bar Kokhba’ meaning ‘Son of the Star’ in Aramaic from the Star Prophecy verse found in Numbers 24:17: “There shall a star come out of Jacob”.

¹⁸ The “Wisdom of Solomon” was written as a message of encouragement and exhortation for the Jews living somewhere in the Diaspora during the Greco-Roman era. Immersed in a cosmopolitan, pagan culture, one that generally viewed Judaism with suspicion if not contempt, many Jews felt hard-pressed to remain loyal to the basic principles and practices of their faith. The book works to affirm the basis of that faith and critiques those who oppose it, in the interests of promoting adherence to Jewish traditions in changing, difficult circumstances. The discourse commences by contrasting the righteous and the wicked, their ways, their reasoning about life, and their destinies. Composed in Greek, “The Wisdom of Solomon” is among the most Hellenised works of the Apocrypha in that it reflects extensive interaction with Greek literary and philosophical conventions (Enns 2000). An interesting point about the discourse is that its focus on Greek culture does not work to promote the achievements of Greek culture, but to appropriate them, so as to prove the excellence of Judaism in categories relevant to the then audience’s multicultural environment. ‘Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach’ (sometimes abbreviated to ‘Ben Sira’ or simply ‘Sirach’), is a work of ethical teachings from approximately 200 to 175 BCE written by the Jewish scribe Simon ben Yeshua ben Eliezer ben Sira of Jerusalem.

temple (2 Chr 26:22-3). By contrast, the Christian Old Testament ends with Malachi, the last of the Minor Prophets, which looks forward to the coming of Elijah at the end of the ages to bring both reconciliation to families and an escape from the judgement of God (Mal 4:5-6). The way that each scripture canon is ordered presents a significantly different message to its readers, although in both it ends on a strong message of hope.

Sealing the Biblical Canon

The canonisation of the Hebrew Scriptures—which is the final act in making the Hebrew Bible—is an act of closure in the sense that the scribes of the Second Temple propagated the notion of the closure of the prophetic era, which might also be termed the canonical era; the closure of the canon is a derivative of that doctrine. (van der Toorn 2007, 262)

The limits of the scriptures that defined both faith and the will of God for the Jewish and Christian communities were largely fixed by the middle to late fourth century, even though questions about some books continued for a while longer. Despite the complex and often unknown circumstances that led to the closing of the biblical canon, the available evidence allows some conclusions to be drawn. The factors that shaped the contours of scripture collections were theological, social, and practical/political.¹⁹ In the first instance, there was a belief in Judaism that with the lack of prophets following Ezra, the production of divine literature ceased. While the Christians did not accept that belief, they did acknowledge the scriptures they received from the Jews, but also came to the view that new scriptures were needed for their community. These scriptures were framed by a commonly accepted body of beliefs about Jesus that circulated in early Christianity. The social, or historical, factors that led the church to finalise its sacred collections included the Roman persecutions of the Church under Decius and Diocletian.²⁰ In the latter persecution, Christians were required under threat of death to

¹⁹ For a multidimensional treatment of the trauma of exile and return in relation to the creation and maintenance of theo-political identity, see Bob Becking and Marjo Korpel's (1999) edited collection in *The Crisis of Israelite Tradition*, and the collection in Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking's (2003) edited *Yahwism After the Exile*.

²⁰ The Decian persecution resulted in an edict issued in 250 CE by the Emperor Decius ordering everyone in the Roman Empire to perform a sacrifice to the Roman gods and for the well-being of the Emperor. The edict ordered that the sacrifices be performed in the presence of a Roman magistrate. It was the first time Christians had faced legislation forcing them to choose between their religious beliefs and death. The edict appears to have been designed more as an Empire-wide loyalty oath than a targeting of Christians.

turn over their sacred writings to the authorities to be burned.²¹ These acts of violence forced Christians to decide which literature was sacred and could not be turned over to the authorities without violating conscience. Another social factor was Constantine's push for religious conformity within the Christian communities, under the threat of banishment for those who did not comply. These factors do not appear to have influenced the scope of the Jewish biblical canon.

A third factor that surely influenced large communities of faith was Constantine's request of Eusebius to produce fifty copies of the Church's scriptures to be used in the churches of the new Rome, Constantinople, which was the new centre of the Roman Empire (McDonald 1995, 182-90). The contents of whatever it was that Eusebius produced for the emperor must surely have had significant influence on many in the Church in that vicinity (Greece and Asia Minor) and even further away. Prior to the late fourth century, when the capacity of books was not sufficient to include all of the sacred writings, churches and synagogues often had unbound collections of books or manuscripts. This affected the ordering or sequence of the books, and probably also the contents of the biblical canons (Gamble 1995). The major sects of Judaism in the first century CE (Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Samaritans, and Christians) agreed that God spoke through divinely inspired writings, but they disagreed on which writings were sacred. The Sadducees accepted only the books of Moses as divine scripture, and the Samaritans acknowledged a modified and enlarged Pentateuch, while the Pharisees accepted initially a much larger collection of scriptures. By the end of the first century, sacred writings were beginning to be more limited in scope for the Jews, even though there was no universal agreement on their number. The Essenes clearly accepted a larger collection than did the Pharisees, especially the Community Rule, Jubilees, and the Temple Scroll (VanderKam 2002; 2000).

The first surviving discussion about a fixed number of books in the Hebrew Bible came at the end of the first century CE when Josephus wrote: "Our books, those which are justly accredited, are but two and twenty, and contain the record of all time" (Against Apion 1.38). He describes a closed twenty-two-book collection of Hebrew scriptures about which he says, "no one has ventured to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew, from the day of his birth, to regard them as

²¹ See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 8.5-6, and 'Gesta apud Zenophilum' in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 26 (Ziwsa 1983, 186-88). 'Gesta apud Zenophilum' is the truncated record of a trial that took place in 320 CE in the city of Thamugadi before Zenophilus, the Roman consul of Numidia. William Frend (2000) provides an overview of the history of Donatism, the Christian sect within the Roman province of North Africa that flourished in the fourth and fifth centuries among Berber Christians. Donatism was an indirect outcome of Diocletian's persecutions in Roman North Africa.

the decrees of God, to abide by them, and if need be, cheerfully to die for them” (ibid., 1.42). He also identifies these books by categories of Law, or the “books of Moses”, the “prophets who wrote history, and hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life” (ibid., 1.39-40). The reason, he says, why no one adds to them is the “failure of the exact succession of prophets” (ibid., 1.41): that is, the belief that prophecy had ceased in Israel and that writings after that do not have the same merit since they do not have their source in God. Frank Moore Cross suggests that Josephus’s collection may actually have come from Hillel as an import from Babylon (ca. late first century BCE – early first century CE), the early *tanna* (or teacher who repeats traditions) and his school.²² This suggestion may have some merit, and it answers several questions, but it is still only a theory (Cross 1998, 221-5). At roughly the same time (ca. 90-100 CE), the author of 4 Ezra acknowledged twenty-four books that both the ‘worthy and unworthy’ could read, but he also mentions seventy other books that were reserved for the ‘wise’ because in them “is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge” (4 Ezra 14:45-6).²³ Thus the author of 4 Ezra drew different conclusions about the scope of a fixed collection of scriptures at the same time that Josephus argues that all Jews everywhere recognised the same books. Both authors, however, pegged their scripture collections to the sacred letters of the Hebrew and Greek alphabets (twenty-two and twenty-four letters respectively), and 4 Ezra’s acceptance of seventy other books may reflect another holy number: namely, the elders of Israel or the divinely inspired translators of the Law into Greek noted in the *Letter of Aristeas* (Barrett 1987).

In the early development of the Hebrew Bible, there are signs that earlier written materials were recognised as having divine origins and authority in the Jewish community (Neh 8; 1 Kgs 22-3; Dan 9), but there is no record of the processes that were at work in the religious communities that gave rise to the sacred collections that emerged in Judaism and Christianity. Nonetheless, something of those processes can be discerned in the biblical and non-canonical sources that survive antiquity. That is, some reasonable inferences can be made despite the presence of several ambiguities. In the case of the Hebrew Bible, there is no evidence that all Jews either in or outside Palestine

²² The *Tannaim* are the rabbinic sages recorded in the *Mishnah*, which is the first major written redaction of the Jewish oral traditions, and the first major work of rabbinic literature. The edited work by Homolka and Schöttler (2013) provides a comprehensive overview of the role of the rabbi. Also see my note on Hillel in Chapter Two, 70n22.

²³ Fourth Ezra is part of the book known as 2 Esdras, a composite work made up of 5 Ezra 1-2, 4 Ezra 2-14, and 6 Ezra 15-16. Fourth Ezra, the longest of the three, is also the earliest. Written in Hebrew by an anonymous Jew in Israel near the end of the first century CE, it sets forth its author’s anguished reflections on the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by the Romans in 70 CE.

agreed on the matter even at the end of the first century CE, contrary to the opinion of Josephus (Against Apion 1.42). Discussions about which texts ‘defile the hands’ continued in Judaism for several centuries, even if most of the contents of the Hebrew Scriptures had already been largely determined. The question at this time was more one of exclusion than inclusion: namely, whether Jews should continue to read questionable books. Certain disputed writings among the Jews were probably produced in a later period (Esther, Song of Songs, Ezekiel), but especially Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), 1 Enoch, Wisdom of Solomon, Jubilees, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and 1-4 Maccabees, but references to them made their way into various Christian writings (Newsom 2001, 3-10). The attempts to ban some of these books in the Amoraic period (ca. 250-530 CE) of the rabbinic tradition (see *t. Yadayim* 2.13; *y. Sanhedrin* 28a, 100b; *Koheleth Rabbah* 12.12) argues, in fact, for their continued reception in the Jewish community.²⁴

Neither Josephus nor 4 Ezra identifies the books in their collections, and neither speaks of the three categories that eventually identified the books of the Hebrew Bible: Law, Prophets, and Writings. The author of 4 Ezra describes how Ezra was able to drink a special potion of “something like water, but its color was like fire” (4 Ezra 14:39), and his memory increased, allowing him to remember all of the sacred writings including the twenty-four that were for general dissemination and the seventy more that were for those who were wise (14:46-7). Despite Josephus’ claims that all Jews everywhere acknowledged the same sacred books, then, not only is there no evidence of any agreement at that time on all the books that eventually belonged to their scripture collection, but the surviving evidence points in the opposite direction: namely, the large collection cited by the Christians in the first and second century. For example, Jude cites as prophecy a pseudepigraphal writing (Jude 14; cf. 1 Enoch 1:9). An appreciation of apocalyptic books among the Jews waned following the devastating consequences of the failed messianic movement in Israel that once again sought independence from Rome (132-135 CE). This was not so among Christians, who continued appreciation and use of such literature through much of the rest of the second century and even later.

The Essenes also had a much larger collection of scriptures than those that finally attained canonical status in, for example, rabbinic Judaism and in the Protestant

²⁴ The number twenty-four – the number of letters in the Greek alphabet – prevailed in the rabbinic tradition during the period of the Amoraim writing in the third to sixth centuries. Some rabbis contested the scriptural status of some of the books, and many opted for a more limited biblical collection and questioned the status of Song of Songs. For examples, see Leiman (1976, 86-103). The *Koheleth Rabbah* is an haggadic commentary on Ecclesiastes included in the Midrash. Rabbinic literature (Mishnah, Tosefta) and Talmudic texts, unless otherwise specified, are from *The Sefaria Library* (n.d.).

church.²⁵ These extra books were often called ‘apocryphal’ (*apocrypha* meaning ‘hidden’), a term originally used to speak of legitimate ‘hidden’ texts that were read in the churches and used in theological discourse; but eventually the term was used to identify heretical teachings (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 1.20.1; cf. also Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 3.4.29). Jerome is the first to use this term for the ‘deutero-canonical’ writings that were eventually both marginalised and contested in the Church, despite their use in catechetical instruction (Jerome 2006). The pseudepigraphal writings were marginalised in the early church and eventually rejected (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 6.12.3). Later, Christians also acknowledged the importance of the twenty-four letters in the Greek alphabet to enumerate the books of their Old Testament scripture canon and, by various combinations of books, they continued to acknowledge the same sacred number, but were able to accept a variety of additional materials into their collections (Hengel 2003, 58-78).

Regardless of these shifting borders, without question, the Law, or Pentateuch, stands at the heart of all scripture collections for the Jews. The Law was followed by the Prophets (that is, the Former and Latter Prophets of the Hebrew Bible: Joshua-2 Kings and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets), and eventually also by an ambiguous collection eventually called the Writings. What precisely was included in the final group is unclear until the middle to late second century CE, when its contents are listed under the name of *Hagiographa* (literally ‘sacred writings’), or called *Ketubim*. Before then, the books that were later called Writings were called Prophets. As noted, all of the Hebrew Scriptures were eventually identified by the term *Tanakh*,

²⁵ Toward the end of the fourth century CE, Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome to prepare a standard Latin version of the scriptures that was to become known as the Latin Vulgate. In the Old Testament Jerome followed the Hebrew canon: though he also translated the apocryphal books, he called attention to their distinct status in prefaces. Subsequent copyists of the Latin Bible, however, did not always include Jerome’s prefaces, and during the medieval period the Western church generally regarded these books as part of the holy scriptures without differentiation. In 1546 the Council of Trent decreed that the canon of the Old Testament includes them. Subsequent editions of the Latin Vulgate text, officially approved by the Roman Catholic Church, place these books within the Christian sequence of the Old Testament books. Thus Tobit and Judith come after Nehemiah; the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus come after the Song of Solomon; Baruch (with the Letter of Jeremiah as Chapter 6) comes after Lamentation; and 1 and 2 Maccabees conclude the books of the Old Testament. Esther is given its longer Greek form rather than the version based solely on the Hebrew text; the Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Jews appears as vv.24-90 of Chapter 3 of Daniel, and the stories of Susanna and Bel and the Dragon as Chapters 13 and 14 of Daniel. An appendix after the New Testament contains the Prayer of Manasseh and 1 and 2 Esdras, without implying canonical status. The Eastern Orthodox Churches recognise several other books as authoritative. Editions of the Old Testament approved by the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church contain, besides the Roman Catholic Deuterocanonical books, 1 Esdras, Psalm 151, the Prayer of Manasseh, and 3 Maccabees, while 4 Maccabees appears in an appendix. Slavonic Bibles approved by the Russian Orthodox Church contain, besides the Deuterocanonical books, 1 and 2 Esdras (called 2 and 3 Esdras), Psalm 151, and 3 Maccabees. It should be noted that the Protestant and Roman Catholic canons differ in content and arrangement. Protestant Bibles have followed the Hebrew canon, though in a different order. The disputed book, if they are included at all, have generally been placed in a separate section, usually between the Old and New Testaments, and sometimes, following the New Testament.

but, in New Testament times, the most common designations for the sacred scriptures included ‘the Law’. Initially, the rabbinic tradition also regularly spoke of ‘the Law’ or ‘the Law and the Prophets’ as designations for all scripture (*m. Rosh Hashanah* 4.6; *m. Megillah* 4.3, 4; *t. Bava Metzia* 11.23; *t. Terumoth* 1.10). Only gradually (generally after the fourth to fifth centuries) are the three parts of the Hebrew Bible regularly mentioned (*t. Rosh Hashanah* 4.6; *y. Megillah* 73d) or identified. In the first century BCE-CE, and for a considerable time afterwards, ‘Writings’ were not a part of the *lingua franca* of either Jews or Christians.

Thus far in this chapter, I have discussed the processes of canon – the closing off and sealing the Bible (and by extension, identity) and of maintaining tradition – which have been traditionally thought to be the final act in the making of biblical texts. From these processes of socio-historical convergence and divergence of oral traditions becoming written sources, I have shown that this ‘final act’ is also an enacting of the ‘closed’ text, a reaffirming of community practices and beliefs so as to, in effect, construct the community’s world in this closed book. Having thus traced the books of the Hebrew Bible as products of scribal culture and having delineated how disparate parts and genres have coalesced into one book, and perhaps why this one book has been legitimised and accorded canonised status, it is now time to revision this notion of a closed canon. On the basis of this complex contested process of biblical canonisation, I shall argue that canons cannot function as closed and fixed totalities. Canons cannot hold fast to the content they strive to contain.

Canons Uncovered

The lack of external controls to ensure that the right meaning of the text is protected from the biases and idiosyncrasies of the interpreter or the interpretive community creates the potential for an infinite number of possible interpretations of any individual text. (Trotter 1999, 295)

I have thus far provided a review of the idea of canon as well as its process of formation in order to demonstrate the inadequacy of any idea of definitive points of origin, as evidenced by the processes’ contentious history of legitimation and authorisation. The processes of closing canon, processes seeking to shore up its borders, can, however, also be read as resistances to a One and Only thinking (whether that thinking be a monotheistic configuration, or a configuration on a true Christian pathway, or a one true

text). The Bible, in its various instantiations, despite canonisation, continues to be uncapturable.²⁶ In my recounting of this process of attempts to close the biblical text (and, ironically, to prevent its proliferation), the inevitable conclusion is that the Bible can only be thought of as indeterminate and undecidable. Although I have not been able to provide an exhaustive description of the socio-political detail of these processes (and there are any number of texts that provide a much fuller account),²⁷ these same processes of canonisation, legitimation and resistance are the focus of other chapters, albeit under other frameworks. My intention here, however, has been to bring more clearly to the foreground the tenuous background of a text that is erroneously thought to have such a ‘good’ (that is, ‘originary’ and ‘authoritative’) conformation. Nothing could be further from the truth, and this is, I shall argue later, the Bible’s single greatest strength and the clue to its longevity. It is now time to turn to this most consistent of elements – the text’s indeterminacy as demonstrated in its excessive structure as well as its purported meaning.

Biblical Commentary

A treatise consisting of a systematic series of comments or annotations on the text of a literary work; an expository treatise following the order of the work explained. (“Commentary” *O.E.D Online* 2014)

It is clear that biblical canons are never as cloistered or above suspicion as their councils would like them to be. Indeed, as James Trotter reminds us in his discussion on dynamic reader-response approaches to readers making meaning, “Antiformalist theory does not argue for the removal of constraints on the production of meaning but an observation that such constraints have never really existed” (Trotter 1999, 295). This insight is particularly evident when the practice of biblical commentary is considered. I have three Hebrew Bibles, two Greek Bibles, an Aramaic Bible, and five English Bibles which all contain a series of prefaces, introductions, maps, concordances, lists, tables, marginal

²⁶ One example of the way the Hebrew Bible continues to elude capture is demonstrated by *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ). This fifth edition supersedes the fourth edition of *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) and has been in production by Deutsche Bibel Gesellschaft since 2004 with an estimated release date of 2020. Even prior to publication BHQ already supersedes the scholarly third and fourth editions of *Biblica Hebraica*. The production of another edition of BH has interesting implications for claims of textual authenticity, the purpose and audience of ecumenical texts, and the making of critical editions of the Hebrew Bible.

²⁷ For example, see the work of Carr (2011); van der Toorn (2007); Cook (2004); Albertz (2003); Gottwald (2001); Watts (2001); P. Miller (2000a; 2000b); Carter (1999); McNutt (1999); P. Davies (1998); Lemche (1998); Edelman (1996a); Berquist (1995); Aberbach (1993); and Ahlström (1993).

notes, sigla, indexes and appendices to guide and shape my reading. The “Preface to the Reader” to the third edition of *The New Oxford Annotated NRSV Bible*, reminds me – the reader – of the long tradition surrounding biblical texts (literally as well as politically) with commentaries, annotations and editorial prefaces with the following:

This preface is addressed to you by the Committee of translators, who wish to explain, as briefly as possible, the origin and character of our work ... To summarize in a single sentence: the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible [published in 1989] is an authorized revision of the Revised Standard Version, published in 1952, which was a revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901, which, in turn, embodied earlier versions of the King James Version, published in 1611. (NRSV, xvii)

There is a sense here that the Bible is an ongoing work in progress in terms of revision, publication, and dissemination. The Preface, however, does not clearly point out the editing traditions actually inscribed in the foundations of the Bible, specifically the Hebrew Bible adopted by the Christian church as the Old Testament. We commonly think of the Bible as a book or a collection of books – the very name of the Bible goes back to the Greek *biblia*, for ‘books’. This has since become the accepted view of the Bible. It informs the rabbinical discussions on the order and the authors of biblical books, and explains our custom of speaking of, for instance, the ‘Book of Genesis’, the ‘Book of Isaiah’ and the ‘Book of Job’. However old and entrenched this notion of the Bible as a series of books may be, it is a misleading concept. The books of the Bible are not books in the modern sense of the word; to see them as such distorts the historical reality of their manufacture and influence. There were no books in ancient Israel. Books are a Hellenistic invention, created in a time of increased literacy as schools and libraries spread around the Mediterranean and in the Near East.

It is something of a paradox, then, that the Israelites, steeped as they were in an oral culture, should leave a book – or more appropriately, a series of scrolls or books – as their legacy to the world. Reading and writing were restricted to a professional elite; the majority of the population was illiterate (van der Toorn 2007; Trotter 2001b, 39-40; Carter 1999; P. Davies 1998). Even if this observation seems perfunctory, it needs to be made since modern readers are prone to project their own book culture on the people of the Bible when trying to retrieve ‘what really happened’, or what the text ‘really’ means. Though Judaism has been defined as a ‘religion of the book’, it is important to remember that the book in question actually stems from a culture of the spoken word. Hence, if we are to understand the concatenation of the Hebrew Bible (as canon) and

the influence it exerts socio-politically (and, further, how we should reconfigure the Bible's influence), we must familiarise ourselves with the scribal culture that produced it, just as we should be attentive to the ways in which current politics draws on these traditions. That scribal culture was, as I have stated, the culture of a literate elite. The scribes who manufactured what we now refer to as 'the bible', were professional writers affiliated to the temple of Jerusalem. They practised their craft in a time when there was neither a trade in books nor a reading public of any substance. Scribes wrote for scribes. To the public at large, the books of the Bible were icons of a body of knowledge accessible only through the oral instruction presented by religious experts. And as such, the texts that comprise the Hebrew Bible were not part of the popular culture. The Hebrew Bible was created and studied in the scribal workshop of the temple. In its fundamental essence, it was a product of the priesthood (van der Toorn 2007; P. Davies 1998; Bar-Ilan 1990).

Just as there was a socio-political milieu for the production of biblical texts, a socio-political milieu also holds for the production and dissemination of biblical commentaries. There were three main early Jewish approaches to biblical interpretation: *Midrash*, *Targumim* and *Talmud*. In its broadest sense, Midrash refers to a particular mode of scriptural interpretation practised by rabbis, and is also a corpus of literature composed of rabbinic scriptural interpretation. Targumim refers to biblical interpretation written in Aramaic, the *lingua franca* of Judaism resulting from the Diaspora and Persian Period (539-334 BCE). And Talmud is another large body of literature consisting of the Mishnah and the Talmud proper – also known as *Gemara* – that includes the *Palestinian Talmud* and the *Babylonian Talmud*.²⁸

Rabbinical commentaries are, like all artefacts, products of their communities. Hebrew Bibles today still contain the celebrated early (1000-1600 CE) and later (1600-CE) rabbinical commentaries, as well as the various *masorah* or marginal notes to accompany the 'original' text. For example, the 1997 editions of the Hebrew Bible (both The Stone Edition *Chumash* and the *Tanach*) are accompanied by the commentary of the eleventh-century French Rabi Schlomo ben Yitzchak (1040-1106 CE), more commonly known as Rashi the "father of all commentators" (*Tanach* 1997, xvi). If we

²⁸ Any work by Jacob Neusner on Midrash provides extensive commentary and references to rabbinic sources. See, for example, *The Mishnah: Religious Perspectives* (1999), *The Mishnah: Social Perspectives: Philosophy, Economics, Politics* (2002), *Rabbinic Narrative: A Documentary Perspective* (2003), and *The Mishnah in Contemporary Perspective, Part Two* (2006, edited with Avery-Peck). The Yerushalmi Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud, also known as the Palestinian Talmud) is the precursor and basis of the Babylonian Talmud, the Midrash literature, and much synagogal poetry. Additionally, the four volume bilingual commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud edited by Heinrich Guggenheimer (2012; 2011; 2005; 2000) offers a number of introductions, notes, indices and general matter.

turn to a brief example of Rashi's commentary, on Genesis 22, which is the narrative of God commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, Rashi's commentary on the phrase "bring him up", recasts the story thus:

Bring him up. God did not say, "slaughter him," because he did not intend for Isaac to be slaughtered, but only that he be *brought up* to the mountain and be *prepared* as a burnt offering. Once Abraham had complied literally and *brought him up*, God told him not to slaughter Isaac [v.12]. This resolves the apparent contradiction between God's original command that Isaac be brought as an offering and His later command that he remain unharmed. Abraham had been commanded to *bring him up*, which he did, but not to actually slaughter him. (Rashi cited in *The Chumash* 1994, 101)

The presence of the commentary here, acts as a double-bind. Not only does Rashi's commentary recast the emphasis of this passage in terms of allaying fears that God might be contradicting himself (in which case, God would not be God), but the commentary also attempts to bind the reader to the idea of an 'original' and 'authoritative' text in a very particular way. In one sense, then, biblical commentaries attempt to bind both texts and readers to particular ways of reading and understanding in accordance with the interests of groups (such as the priesthood, the temple, the believing community), albeit with different degrees of success.²⁹

I suggest that the publishers behind The Stone Edition Hebrew Bibles in New York, the board of trustees and the vast array of contributing editors and rabbis fail to place Rashi in a fuller context at the intersection of lively debate and correspondence. They credit him as being a leading Jewish exegete, but by placing a small excerpt of

²⁹ Being directed how to read is not limited to medieval or even orthodox communities; there is no shortage of contemporary instruction for how one ought to read, such as Daniel J. Harrington (2005) *How Do Catholics Read the Bible?*; Mark L. Strauss (2011) *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times*; and Marc Zvi Brettler's (2005) *How to Read the Bible* is an historical-critical approach to reading. Brettler's work makes a welcome change in a market dominated by the Christian tradition. He takes care to set out what reading as a Jew or scholar looks like. Clearly the idea that there is a 'correct way' to read and understand the Bible is difficult to maintain outside of religious orthodoxy. The spate of recent commentaries on how to read includes but is not limited to: Steven L. McKenzie (2005) *How to Read the Bible: History, Prophecy, Literature – Why Modern Readers Need to Know the Difference and What It Means for Faith Today*. If nothing else, I allot McKenzie kudos for his chapter titles: "Not Exactly as It Happened: Historiography and the Bible", "Forthtelling, Not Foretelling: Biblical Prophecy" and "Not the End of the World as We Know It: Apocalyptic Literature in the Bible". Also see James L. Kugel's (2007) *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*. Whilst several of these have been written in all likelihood in response to heightened angst in a post 9/11 world, Kugel's book seems to have gained more traction than the other publications. This is perhaps evidenced in the large stamp of approval on the book's cover from *The New York Times Book Review* stating "Awesome, thrilling ... Kugel aims to prove that you can read the Bible rationally without losing God. A magisterial, erudite, yet remarkably witty tour". Praise for Kugel's magisterial work continues on the back cover from *The Washington Post*, and *The Onion*: "No writer on the Bible has wrestled so profoundly with the most basic, important questions raised by our conflicting knowledge and desires".

Rashi's commentary in isolation under, next to, and around Genesis 22, they leave things out and they box other things in. Most importantly, they leave out the fact that Rashi was part of a vibrant literate community of scholars dedicated to translation and interpretation, and that much of his work was actually done in response to the work of others. What Rashi has written here, then, is only part of an ongoing conversation, and it is the context of this larger conversation, this exchange, this relationality, that is missing from the sound-bites we find in publications which seek to marry 'original' and 'authoritative' biblical texts with commentaries on how to best read and understand the Bible. What is not included are the questions and responses from other rabbis and scholars. What is missing is the sense of a radical kind of interpretation that scholars such as Rashi were engaged in – the kind of radical questioning that leads to thinking that Abraham might have misunderstood God's command (or that God could contradict itself).

Conclusion

What is at stake in opening 'closed' text(s) and canons? For biblical tradition(s), the stakes are nothing short of the creation and maintenance of a particular identity, of particular communities, an operation arguably entailing exclusivity and the displacement of other(s).³⁰ As a genealogical perspective underscores, however, there are always other operations going on that might diminish such exclusionary operations by drawing out – retrieving – different models for understanding and (as) community from the relevant traditions. In the forthcoming chapters – specifically Chapters Two to Seven – my aim is to engage a genealogical method to further identify and trace both the stabilising and destabilising processes and singularities informing various dimensions of monotheism and its presencing. The first of these concerns the complex relationalities presumed to connect canon with history.

³⁰ I want to make myself clear. Identity cannot function as anything other than 'particular', as shown in my discussion on the named and not-named in Chapter Seven. However, the way in which particularity is expressed, inscribed, reinforced, and deployed is, I argue, often at the expense of other possibilities – of a greater ethical engagement, of self-creation, of construal of the Other, over and against the not-us – while shoring up the identity of a One and Only logic. Furthermore, to shore up the One's identity at the expense of the Other is, arguably, an exclusionary and, perhaps, constitutively violent act. There is no shortage of examples to draw on: the appropriation of Palestinian land by the State of Israel from 1967 onwards; the Sabra and Shatila massacre of 1982; ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Rwanda; right-wing Christians bombing abortion clinics and killing homosexuals in the United States of America; Australian foreign policy which chooses to assist Christian Iraqis but not Muslim Iraqis nor Syrians. I will propose and briefly sketch a counter position based on the ethical supplementing of monotheist logic in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Two

Eventalising the Bible as History

The biblical literature and the history and society of ancient Israel, Judaism, and Christianity will never be exhausted in terms of the scrutiny to which they can be subjected. (Knight in Hayes 2004, x-xi)

All readings of the Bible are ideological [and the] ideological criticism of the Bible entails the twin effort (1) to read the ancient biblical stories for their ideological content and mode of production and (2) to grasp the ideological character of contemporary reading strategies. (The Bible and Culture Collective 1995, 277)

An Evental Problem: Bible as History

During the early twentieth century, the North American religious landscape was marked by contention between liberal (sometimes designated as ‘modernist’) and conservative theological perspectives. In the light of advances in the study of the history of religions and the literary history of the Bible, the modernist view traced in the Bible a millennial-spanning movement in human consciousness from primitive polytheism to a more sophisticated monotheism. The Bible’s ‘presentation’ of a monotheistic Israelite faith during the time of Moses was taken to be a retrojection from a much later era of a more fully developed religious faith. Historical literary analysis by scholars such as Julius Wellhausen convinced many that the biblical narratives could not offer anything like a reliable history.¹ In contrast to this modernist perspective, the conservative view argued the historical reliability of biblical accounts and the uniqueness of central elements of

¹ First published in 1885, Wellhausen’s (1957) *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, in particular his formulation of the Documentary Hypothesis, was a significant contribution to the scholarly understanding of the origin of the Pentateuch. Wellhausen’s work laid a foundation for much subsequent work in biblical interpretation including form criticism, discourse analysis, narratology, structuralism, feminist interpretation, liberation analysis, ideological criticism, social-scientific studies, and folklore studies.

Israelite faith such as (early) teachings of monotheism. Such tensions draw to the forefront questions concerning the status of biblical narratives and materials.

Responsive to similar questions of status, the modern tradition of biblical criticism originated in the rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and developed within the context of the scientific approach to the humanities (especially history), which grew during the nineteenth century.² Specifically, modern biblical criticism begins with the seventeenth century with Thomas Hobbes (e.g. 2004 [1651]), Benedictus de Spinoza (e.g. 2007 [1670]), Richard Simon (e.g. 2013a [1682]; 2013b [1689]), and others who began to ask questions about the origin of the biblical text, particularly the Pentateuch.³ They asked in particular who had written these books. According to tradition their author was Moses, but these critics found contradictions and inconsistencies in the text that, they claimed, made the earlier assumptions of Mosaic authorship implausible.⁴ In the eighteenth century, Jean Astruc (e.g. 1999 [1753]) set out to refute these critics. Borrowing methods of textual criticism already in use to investigate Greek and Roman texts, he discovered what he believed were two distinct documents within Genesis. These, he proposed, were the original scrolls written by Moses, much as the four Gospel writers had produced four separate but complementary accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus.⁵ Later generations, he believed, had conflated these original documents to produce the modern book of Genesis, producing thereby the inconsistencies and contradictions noted by Hobbes and Spinoza (Wenham 2003, 162-163).

Astruc's methods were adopted by Johann Gottfried Eichhorn and Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette in a movement that became known as 'higher criticism' (to distinguish it from the far longer-established close examination and comparison of individual manuscripts, called 'lower criticism'). This school reached its apogee with

² I further discuss these developments of rationalism and the scientific method in Chapter Four and throughout subsequent chapters, along with their significance for my genealogy of monotheism and its One and Only thinking.

³ 'Pentateuch' is a term Christian scholars use for the first five books of the Old Testament: comprising Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Originally this term was used in the Hellenistic Judaism of Alexandria to refer to the five books (or scrolls) of the Law of Moses.

⁴ The most implausible being that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Bible attributed to him, given that 'he recounts his own death' in Deuteronomy 34.

⁵ This is referred to as the 'synoptic gospels', where 'synoptic' refers to the way Matthew, Mark and Luke include many of the same stories, often in similar sequence and wording, but stand in contrast to John whose content is comparatively distinct. The 'synoptic problem' refers directly to the precise nature of their literary relationship. The majority view favours Marcan priority, in which Matthew and Luke have made direct use of Mark as a source, and further holds that Matthew and Luke also drew on an additional hypothetical document called 'Q'. PHEME PERKINS (2009) provides a solid introduction to the issues in *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels*. The standard working text for commencing synoptic studies – *Synopsis Quattor Evangeliorum* – is edited by Kurt Aland (2007).

the influential work of Wellhausen in the 1870s, at which point it seemed to many that the Bible had at last been fully explained as a human document rather than a document of divine origins. In summation, the modern approach to biblical studies is concerned to return to and reappraise the origin of the literary sources, the historical documents, the ancient practices of the biblical texts and the people responsible for their production and dissemination. The modern push for origin thus began to be concerned with the earliest possible points from which biblical texts, communities, and practices could be ultimately derived. As such, the push back toward the question of origin in modern biblical criticism looked for the causes in operation before the final texts were brought into being. Such a search necessarily entailed the creating of new categories of study, methodologies and theories in order to speak of textual development in a meaningful way – that is, rational, scientific, and progressive – and to trace ultimate causes, and establish provenance. One can think here, for example, of the way in which claims to linguistic or archaeological provenance are considered to create legitimacy, a point I return to in this and subsequent chapters.

These new methodological approaches radically shifted the biblical point of origin, as detailed above, from the divine to the human. Many religious scholars, not least the Catholic Church, did not welcome the implications of higher criticism. Pope Leo XIII condemned secular biblical scholarship in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (Fogarty 1989). However, in 1943, Pope Pius XII gave license to the new scholarship in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*:

textual criticism ... [is] ... quite rightly employed in the case of the Sacred Books ... Let the interpreter then, with all care and without neglecting any light derived from recent research, endeavor to determine the peculiar character and circumstances of the sacred writer, the age in which he lived, the sources written or oral to which he had recourse and the forms of expression he employed. (Pius XII in Fogarty 1989, 40)

The modern Catechism of the Catholic Church similarly states that:

In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current. For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression. (Pius XII 1943)

We find stated, then, in the contemporaneous Catechism of the Catholic Church, the eventual problematic that orients this chapter: the problem of Bible as history.⁶ This at its core – as both Foucault and Derrida would stress – marks an issue of interpretation, and of the relation of interpretation to so-called ‘original’ texts and artefacts. To clarify this problem further, it is worth noting that because of its overriding concern for the history and prehistory of the text, historical biblical criticism arguably tended to be primarily interested in the ‘original’ meaning of the text, what it (might have) meant to its first readers, as opposed to what it might mean to a modern reader. This orientation also explains the significance given to the discipline of archaeology, for example, by many biblical scholars. Concerns, however, have been raised with regard to some archaeologists allowing the biblical account of, for instance, the conquest of Israel, to determine the site and scope of their excavations, and with the aims of more recent archaeologists to reconstruct, from archaeological evidence alone, the actual nature of Iron Age I society in the hill country (these issues will be discussed in more detail below). Such examples of specifically ‘biblical archaeology’⁷ provide a cogent instance of an academic enterprise that became caught in the slippage that can occur between a quest for origins (as the root, the source, the foundation) and an idea of truth (as in fact, absolute veracity, the quality of something being accepted as true and fixed).

This chapter, then, maps genealogically another key discursive event for the monotheistic discourses, the development, justifications and inherent slippages of the modern tradition of the historical interpretation of monotheism and the Bible. Concerned as it is with this tradition, the chapter began by introducing the problem of researching bible as history. This problem will now be examined in detail with reference to its framing and uptake by the influential Albright School of biblical archaeology, an examination which also raises questions regarding the role archaeology has exerted in biblical scholarship. The last section of the chapter delivers a general outline of the field of the historical interpretation of monotheism in modern biblical criticism, bringing to the fore a range of its main themes, debates and tensions which arise alongside what Foucault calls singularities, defined earlier as those points or events which can mark the disruption and collapse of seemingly coherent discourses. As was outlined in the Introduction and the previous chapter, Foucault’s genealogical

⁶ Note that when I refer to Bible as history, I am not referring to biblical literalism – the type of literalist interpretation associated with fundamentalist or evangelical approaches to biblical texts. I am instead referring to the beginnings of the historical quests as represented by a certain kind of practice or location, for example, ‘biblical archaeology’ or the quest for the historical Jesus.

⁷ An overview of biblical archaeology can be found in John Bartlett’s (1997) *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation*.

intentions stress engaging with a plurality of materials, discursive (in the narrow sense) and extra-discursive; foregrounding local material practices where power relations are enacted; and attending to the tensions, emersions, fissures and ruptures in what might otherwise appear to be continuous discourse. These aims orient my focus and practice in this and forthcoming chapters.

Albright's Biblical Archaeology: One Event in the Problem of Bible as History

In a modern cultural context deeply imprinted with scientific methods, the biblical archaeology proposed by William Foxwell Albright was an attempt to demonstrate the basic truth of orthodoxy on the basis of a scientifically unassailable history of Western religion that culminated in Judeo-Christian monotheism. Albright's historical research sought a full explanation of the Bible and its ancient context according to scientific examination of empirical philological and archaeological evidence. With this aim, Albright became a champion of the aforementioned biblical archaeology, the results of which were expected to command respect by any scientific measure, and secure a position of relevance and influence over modern biblical interpretations.⁸ Through its proposed syntheses of inscriptional, archaeological, textual, and historical evidence, the Albright School made a claim to confidence in the basic historicity of biblical accounts. For example, season upon season of archaeological excavations in Palestine revealed evidence of city destruction patterns in the thirteenth century BCE seemingly consistent with the biblical account of the conquest under Joshua. In this fashion, many events from literary Israel's early history were placed on surer historical footing. Such syntheses also provided the basis for one of Albright's students, John Bright, to publish a reconstruction of ancient Israelite history that stands out from most other major works of this sort by claiming historicity for much of what the Hebrew Bible narrates.⁹

A reciprocal dynamic of interest and influence connected the Albright history school with the biblical-theology movement in North America. If scientific historical

⁸ For a detailed discussion of the current academic debate regarding biblical archaeology as well as sections discussing how stories talk about the past and more importantly how historians create a past with reference to the Bible's place in history, see Thomas L. Thompson's (1999) *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel*.

⁹ First published in 1959, Bright's (2000) *History of Israel* is now in its fourth edition. In a similar vein, see Bright's (1967) *The Authority of the Old Testament*.

and archaeological research indicated that biblical writings were centrally concerned with real historical events and their ancient interpretation, then the events of the Bible would have to be factored into modern biblical-theological work.¹⁰ This was significant because it had been felt that without securely established historical bases, ancient Israel's 'theological witness' would not command serious attention from the modern historically conscious mind and so could not convincingly contribute to theology.¹¹ Thus, a certain theological motivation prompted Albright and his students to work towards reconstruction of the 'actual events' underlying the biblical narratives about ancient Israelites encountering God.¹² And indeed it was another of Albright's students, G. Ernest Wright, who became influential in the biblical-theology movement through works such as *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (1952) and *Biblical Archaeology* (1962), in which he argued for a specifically biblical archaeology:

Biblical archaeology is a special "armchair" variety of general archaeology. The biblical archaeologist may or may not be an excavator himself, but he studies the discoveries of excavations in order to glean from them every fact that throws direct, indirect, or even diffused light upon the Bible. He must be intelligently concerned with stratigraphy and typology, upon which the methodology of modern archaeology rests ... Yet his chief concern is not with methods or pots or

¹⁰ The term 'biblical theology' is ambiguous as it can mean either the theology contained in the Bible or a theology in accordance with what the Bible contains. It has been applied to various movements within biblical scholarship from the late eighteenth century onwards. At its heart it presupposes the unity of the 'Old' and 'New' Testaments. I am presently using the term to describe the 'Old Testament' aspect of a movement that was prominent, especially, although not exclusively, in English-speaking scholarship in roughly the period 1945 to 1960. It was an attempt to harness the results of historical-critical study of the Bible to the theological and social needs of the Christian churches in the immediate post-war period.

¹¹ The term 'theological witness' is used to highlight methodological questions concerned with how the Bible represents its theology. Whilst it is difficult to speak of biblical theology as a single, homogenous task, researchers following this line of questioning are concerned in one way or another with the development of theological views and the forces that went into shaping the Bible. The grounding of this kind of questioning needs to make a number of presuppositions including the Bible's history of tradition, its nature as authoritative canon, and the diversity of its theological witnesses and communities. Salvation History approaches are one example of this method's functioning, of which Leopold von Ranke is an exemplar (Ranke 1884). Tradition History approaches in the vein of Gerhard von Rad (1953; 1966; 1972; 1975; 1984), and Brevard Childs' (1970) *Canonical Method*, would also be included as utilising the language of 'theological witness'. Also see Walter Brueggemann's (1997) *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*; Odil Hannes Steck's (2000) *The Prophetic Books and their Theological Witness*; and James K. Mead's (2007) *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes*.

¹² Today few biblical scholars would endorse Albright's enthusiasm for such conclusive historical claims. This is for two reasons. First, through further refinement of the very methods Albright had introduced, archaeologists have gone on to produce syntheses of evidence far less supportive of key Albrightean conclusions. For example, it is no longer certain that the thirteenth-century destruction layers among the ruins of Canaanite cities can be attributed to Israelite conquest. Second, Albright's confidence derived in part from the astounding breadth of his historical and linguistic expertise. The now firmly established trend toward academic specialisation – prevalent in all fields from the sciences to the humanities – makes it doubtful whether any longer a single individual could acquire the scope of training and expertise sufficient for the authoritatively integrative task to which Albright aspired in such work as *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism in the Historical Process* (1957). Irrespective of this, Albright's legacy for biblical interpretation endures in numerous historical and textual insights as well as in the methodological advances he developed that have since dated his work.

weapons in themselves alone. His central and absorbing interest is the understanding and exposition of the Scriptures. (Wright 1962, 17; cf. Wright 1971)

The core assumption behind Albright's conception of biblical theology was thus that study of the Bible in its ancient context, as established by scientific historical and archaeological methods, would unveil what the biblical writers were actually saying about God. Due, then, to Albright's influence, this touchstone – the historically-critically authenticated witness by the biblical writers to God's active presence in the historical process that they experienced – became a key element incorporated into much of the work by biblical theologians in the mid-twentieth century.

It is, however, this question of the degree of certitude attached to the Bible *as history* that has occasioned the long-standing and perhaps widening divide between historians and literary critics. While some would insist on the historical dependability of the Bible, others argue that the texts cannot be relied upon as history. Wright placed himself – and, to a degree, Albright – in a particularly exposed position when he appeared to argue that recent archaeological research had established the reliability of biblical history. Theologians criticised his use of the category 'revelation of history', whilst archaeologists doubted his methodology. Meanwhile the general reader, for whom he was so often writing, was encouraged in the view that biblical archaeology was indeed primarily concerned to prove the truth of the Bible.

The Role of Archaeology in Biblical Scholarship

Biblical scholarship needs the archaeologist as it needs the anthropologist, the epigraphist, the philologist, the Assyriologist, the classical scholar, the student of Qumran, the rabbinic scholar, and others, for interpretations of biblical writings. As such, it is important to situate archaeology not so much as a method *of* biblical scholarship but as an intellectual discipline and practice, incorporating many methods and subject to many methodologies, assisting the modern interpretation of the Bible. Nonetheless, as should now be clear, the nature of the assistance it is capable of rendering is disputed for several reasons. Current archaeologists reject the Albright view of archaeology as a handmaid to biblical scholarship or as a prop for belief, and biblical scholars sometimes find archaeologists naïve in their treatment of biblical

evidence (and vice versa). It is important that this debate concerning what archaeology can and cannot do for biblical scholarship is kept firmly in mind.

Archaeology has, for example, produced little non-contentious evidence that connects directly with the biblical narrative. Hence, although the Mesha Stele found in modern Dhiban in 1868 certainly testifies to a King Mesha and to the Israelite Omri and his son (though Ahab is not named in the stele), it fits uneasily with the biblical narrative of 2 Kings 3. A broken Aramaic stele from Tel Dan discovered in 1993-94 certainly refers to Hadad of Syria¹³ and to “the house of David” but with less certainty to the Israelite and Judaen kings “[J]oram, son of [Ahab]” and “[Ahaz]yahu son of [Jehoram]” (Mykytiuk 2004, 110). Assyrian records refer to several kings of Israel and Judah, and Babylonian records to Jehoiachin (cf. 2 Kgs 24:12); the Assyrian capture of Lachish (701 BCE) is portrayed on surviving limestone slabs from the Assyrian palace at Nineveh – now in the British Museum – but this event is not mentioned in the Bible. Furthermore, while archaeological evidence may illuminate the cultural background and confirm (in particular via inscription) some details of the biblical texts, it also foregrounds a number of problems. For instance, the archaeological evidence for the late Bronze – Early Iron Age I Canaan no longer supports the picture of the Israelite military conquest of Canaan as given in the book of Joshua (Dever 2003; Finkelstein 1988). Similarly, the archaeological evidence for a flourishing Solomonic tenth-century BCE city of Jerusalem is virtually absent, for whatever reason, and the attribution of the six chambered gateways and attached walls at Gezer, Megiddo, and Hazor (cf. 1 Kgs 9:15) to the work of Solomon in the tenth century BCE (Yadin 1958; Dever 1997; 2001; Holladay 2003) is now strongly challenged (Finkelstein and Silberman 2001, 135-45, 340-44).

While the Deuteronomistic History¹⁴ – for reasons of its own compilers – makes little of the Israelite kings Omri and Ahab, archaeological evidence from the Iron Age IIB (ca. 900-700 BCE) makes clearer that it is their age, the ninth century BCE, that saw the establishment of the kingdom of Israel and its relative prosperity and independence

¹³ The reference to Hadad of Syria in the first few lines of the inscription refers to the Northwest Semitic storm god, cognate in name and origin with the earlier attested East Semitic Akkadian (Assyrian-Babylonian) god Adad (See Gibson 2004 [1978]; Handy 1994; Day 2000; M. S. Smith 2002).

¹⁴ Since the work of German Hebrew Bible scholar Martin Noth (e.g. 1972), the Former Prophets (Joshua to 2 Kings) have been seen as part of the so-called Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) that is contained in the books Deuteronomy–2 Kings and which, according to more recent research, was subject to various stages of growth, consisting of the putting together of blocks of material. The Documentary Hypothesis (DH) assumes that there were two accounts of the occupation of the land – with one account the sources of the Tetrateuch (Genesis to Numbers) came to an end, the other saw the DtrH in Deuteronomy–Joshua begin – before the two literary wholes were brought together. This resulted in the story for the occupation of the land being overwritten in the Tetrateuch. See Noth’s (1972) *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*.

through the eighth century until its destruction by Assyria in 722 BCE. The Deuteronomistic History explains the Assyrian destruction of Samaria by underlining Israelite religious apostasy (2 Kgs 17: 7-18), and explains Jerusalem's preservation from similar destruction by King Hezekiah's prompt political submission (2 Kgs 18:14) and religious penitence in time of crisis (2 Kgs 19); but the Deuteronomist does not openly mention the brutal destruction of the city of Lachish so vividly presented by excavations at Lachish and by the reliefs at Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh (see Ussishkin 1997). And, finally, archaeology has provided visible evidence of religious and cultic practices condemned by the Deuteronomistic Historian. At Tel Dan in northern Israel, Avraham Biran excavated a large cult site (cf. 1 Kgs 12:29; Biran 1994), and the detailed finds at Kuntillet 'Ajrûd (south of Kadesh Barnea) and the Khirbet el-Qôm (near Hebron) inscriptions suggest that the goddess Asherah was worshipped alongside Yahweh as a consort (see Dever 1994, 149-51; 2001, 183-87; *contra* Mayes 1997, 63). (These finds and their implications will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, part of my focus on demonstrating the always already existing plurality informing and problematising the monotheistic discourses.)

Having briefly sketched some of the tensions undercutting biblical archaeology as an enterprise in shoring up the quest for the Bible as history – demonstrating thereby some of the difficulties of maintaining Albright's biblical archaeology and Wright's conservatism – it is important to examine more intently the place and work of interpretation in biblical studies. Just as the Albright school of biblical archaeology interpreted physical materials in a sympathetic light with theological desires, it is worth reprising key approaches in the field of biblical interpretation, and what these approaches reveal about the locatedness of researchers. In addition, such a survey will be used to draw attention to the problematic of interpretative practices – made manifest through the multiple contested readings of key events and artefacts: the exile, findings from the Kuntillet 'Ajrûd and Khirbet el-Qôm sites, covenant (to be examined in Chapters Three and Seven), and so forth – issues that will be returned to throughout this dissertation, and becoming increasingly important as this genealogy and (as) deconstruction is mapped.

Surveying the Field: Interpretations of Monotheism and Archaeology

Although in theory biblical theologians suggest that they theorize from the text, in reality, all theologians craft their theological articulations in the light of the critical historical and textual assumptions they have adopted. (Gnuse 1997, 13)

Robert Gnuse here reminds thinkers that many biblical theologians have taken their cue for the creation of biblical or ‘Old Testament’ theologies from their understanding of both the process of Israel’s entry into the land and the emergence of monotheism. It is also not contentious to say that historians, theologians, and biblical scholars often outline the interpretation and affirmation of monotheism as the apex of the contribution of the Hebrew Bible to Western civilisation.¹⁵ A new generation of scholarship has, however, challenged the older paradigms assumed by the ‘(higher) critical scholarship’¹⁶ used in many university and seminary textbooks.¹⁷ Older paradigms here

¹⁵ Throughout the past century, scholars have used terms such as ‘henotheism’ and ‘monolatry’ to describe (and denigrate) the historical and intellectual stages prior to the emergence of ‘pure monotheism’. Whilst polytheism refers to the worship of many gods, both henotheism (elevation of one deity radically over the other gods) and monolatry (worship of one god which ignores other deities) loosely imply that one deity has emerged supreme over the other gods and has usurped their roles. ‘Practical monotheism’, when used with henotheism or monolatry, implies that only one deity is worshipped and all others are ignored. The difference between practical monotheism and pure monotheism is the degree of tolerance shown to the other deities. If other gods are explicitly denied any existence in the universe, then practical monotheism has become ‘pure monotheism’. Most critical scholars (see note 16 below) agree that this is a major psychological leap for people, usually requiring some social and religious crisis to encourage the complete surrender of all gods save one. Finally, when authors speak of ‘ethical monotheism’, they imply that concomitant with the belief in one universal deity is a stress on human rights and dignity in some egalitarian worldviews. Historians and theologians have also observed that social reform, either in ideal expression or in actual practice, often comes with the initial appearance of monotheistic faith (Gnuse 1997).

¹⁶ The term ‘critical scholarship’ refers to a number of perspectives in theology. Firstly, it indicates a period of scholarship occurring after the Reformation, for no other reason than that the Reformation within the Christian traditions is a marker of significant change. This is not to say that everything prior to the Reformation – containing a wealth of Jewish, Christian and Islamic medieval exegesis – is jettisoned or rendered inconsequential; pre-Reformation literature is retained with regard to text criticism and the development of the canon. Secondly, it is used to distinguish between open engagement with all facets of biblical studies/theology and the apologetics of a confessional, conservative scholarship invested in the shoring up of dogma. The distinction refuses to go away and traverses the broad playfield of pedagogy in higher education, issues of accreditation to professional societies, publication/censorship controversies, as well as the more general struggle for biblical studies/theology to be recognised as a current, controversial and serious contender in higher education institutions. ‘Critical scholarship’ should not be confused with the term ‘biblical scholarship’. John Barton suggests that the term ‘biblical scholarship’ is out-dated when he warns “it is common to speak of ‘biblical studies’ and of ‘biblical interpretation,’ but for the older term ‘biblical criticism’ it has become more usual to say ‘the historical-critical method’” (2007, 1). Barton himself prefers the older term ‘biblical criticism’, if only because he is uncomfortable with the idea of equating an historical quest with the discipline. Barton’s (2007) *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* gives an overview of some of the more minor hostilities.

For a perspective on competing theological models in Australian universities and the demarcation between partisan and public institutions, see Brian Douglas and Terence Lovat (2010) “Theology in Australian Higher Education: The “Newcastle Model” brings Theology Home to the Academy”. Douglas and Lovat promote the ‘Newcastle Model’ after a comparison of the Australian theological scene. Unfortunately, their work omits the foundation of, and pedagogical statement of the Theology programme

include uncritical views of history and interpretation as demonstrated in the forward to the first edition of Bright's seminal *A History of Israel* (first published in 1959 and republished as recently as 2000): "It is unnecessary in itself to justify the writing of a history of Israel. Because of the intimate manner in which the message of the Old Testament is related to historical events, a knowledge of Israel's history is essential to its proper understanding" (Bright 2000, xvii). Along with problematising both 'history' and 'interpretation',¹⁸ these newer models – emerging as a result of recent archaeological discoveries and a consequent reassessment of the biblical text – describe Israelite religious development as a slower movement toward the distinctive monotheistic ideas found in the Hebrew Bible, with their final formation in the literary texts being perceived as occurring much later than previously assumed. In addition, Israel's intellectual continuity with the rest of the ancient world is now stressed rather than the older paradigmatic contrast of the Israelite ethos to Canaanite and ancient Near Eastern thought. Also stressed is the realisation that the text of the Hebrew Bible is the product of a long editorial process. Its final shapers were monotheistic and the final editors and redactors of the texts wanted their inherited traditions to reflect their own religious beliefs in a single creator deity, Yahweh, who had at his command the lesser divine beings who also populated heaven, the angels.¹⁹

In summation, then, these scholars of the newer paradigm argue that it was only a small minority of pre-exilic Israelites who were developing monotheistic ideas, and that these ideas probably went through several stages of evolution until Israelites became consistent monotheists in the Babylonian exile. Some critical scholars even

at Murdoch University (Perth, Australia), which, since its inception in the 1980s, advocates a number of the strengths that Douglas and Lovat identify elsewhere. Murdoch's Theology programme places itself and its contribution to academia alongside major universities in the Western world, and clearly aligns itself with the pursuit of critical scholarship as opposed to Christian advocacy, through its rigorous promotion of a serious and at times confronting discipline with emphasis on "critical study and interpretation" (Theology Program 2010).

¹⁷ Also see Brevard S. Childs' (1979) *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* for an example of canonical criticism in which interpretation is focussed on the text of the biblical canon as a finished product. Childs' shift away from critical-historical method to canonical criticism was a major force in theological departments during the 1980s and was in part a reaction to the perceived demise of the Biblical Theology movement in America. Childs' book was reprinted in 2011. Gnuse begins his *No Other Gods* (1997) by introducing Thomas Kuhn's (1970) classic *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* as his model for the adoption of newer paradigm shifts he identifies in the field of biblical studies.

¹⁸ Leo G. Perdue reminds thinkers that "we have been discomfited by the lost [sic] of paradigms and metanarratives that have shaped our worldview" and that we "now have encountered new and compelling realities shaped by what is often to many of us a strange and at times disconcerting discourse" (2005, 1-2).

¹⁹ Had the final editors and redactors of the biblical materials created the texts themselves, they almost certainly would not have included the scattered references to Asherah, Nehushtan, Plague, Pestilence, Death, Sun, Moon and other lesser deities, all of whom they have gone out of their way to turn into either cultic objects used in the worship of Yahweh or more abstract qualities. I discuss these processes in more detail in subsequent chapters.

proposed that this evolution may have been a totally post-exilic phenomenon. The most influential of these various re-interpretations of the development of monotheism are detailed below, an exercise that makes evident the relationalities and tensions holding between diverse new and old interpretations, as well as further elaborating the problematic inherent in the discursive engagement of archaeological artefacts.

To begin with, early ideas that monotheism was connected to the uniformity of the desert, such as the wastelands of the Arabian Desert or the semi-arid steppe lands of Sinai and the Transjordan (e.g. Baly 1970, 254-56), have been thoroughly discredited (Halpern 1983b, 249; Albertz 1994a, 86). Monotheism is presented now by some scholars as much more of an urban phenomenon in the ancient world,²⁰ and even when it is connected to pastoral regions, these are usually in close proximity to urban areas with which they interacted extensively. That is, the current argument is that it took the concentration of intelligentsia in an urban centre to generate, sustain, and communicate the new ideas of a monotheistic faith, as well as organised and concentrated worshipping communities in such centres to accept these beliefs and propagate them along the networks of trade and communication which link cities.²¹ In addition monotheism is assumed to develop most fully in the context of serious intellectual struggles, such as concerned the question of theodicy, the presence of evil in the world and the displacement of people and destruction of religious places of worship (Becking and Korpel, eds. 1999; Trotter 2001a; 2001b; Albertz and Becking 2003). It may also arguably represent a response to the need to keep the high god from becoming too distant. Regardless, this interpretation suggests that the development of monotheism would have been best facilitated by a setting in which intelligentsia discuss such issues with fellow believers and religionists of other faiths. Israelites would have experienced this process in the Babylonian Exile (586-539 BCE) and in the years thereafter known as the Persian Period (539-334 BCE).

A second influential revisioning of early ideas about monotheism concerned the acceptance of notions of Darwinian scientific evolution. Strongly influenced by such

²⁰ For excellent overviews of this position see Lowell K. Handy (1994) *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy*; Robert Karl Gnuse (1997) *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel*; Othmar Keel and Christopher Uehlinger (1998) *Gods and Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*; Nils Peter Lemche (1998) *The Israelites in History and Tradition*; and Mark S. Smith (2002) *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*.

²¹ For an overview of the relationship between urbanism in the ancient Near East and various theo-political developments see the range of essays in Walter E. Aufrecht, Neil A. Miru and Steven W. Gauley (eds. 1997) *Urbanism in Antiquity: From Mesopotamia to Crete*; Charles E. Carter's (1999) *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study*; Raymond Westbrook (ed., 2003) *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, vol. 1; and William W. Hallo (1996) *Origins: The Ancient Near Eastern Background of Some Modern Western Institutions*.

notions, late nineteenth-century scholars described the Israelite religious development as a passage through several stages of evolution toward increased intellectual sophistication until ethical monotheism was attained. Wellhausen (1957 [1878]) and William Robertson Smith (1927) epitomised this view, with their works marking the beginning of modern critical biblical scholarship, and their evolutionary assumptions holding traction among biblical scholars for sixty years. Eventually, however, biblical scholars questioned whether Israel's religious development occurred as neatly as the evolutionary paradigms suggested. Some authors proposed instead the idea of a Mosaic revolution, which abruptly rather than gradually introduced an early-developed form of monotheism. The best-known defender of this viewpoint was Albright (1949; 1957; 1964; 1968) who believed Moses was a monotheist in the same sense that Hillel was in 30 BCE.²² For Albright, Israelites were monotheistic except for simple superstitious folk, and except for those times when the populace slipped back into a syncretism that combined worship of Yahweh with the polytheism of the Canaanites. Albright's views influenced many other scholars, most significantly Wright (1950; 1952) and Bright (2000). Yehezkel Kaufmann (1972) went still further when he denied polytheism to even the masses in Israel. For him, the Israelites were so far removed from polytheism that the prophets and biblical authors misunderstood it in their very critiques of it. Polytheism existed only in the imported cults of the royal courts, and the abuses practiced by Israelites themselves were merely practices connected to fetishism or crass superstitions.

In general, from 1940 to 1970, significant scholars endorsed the idea of a Mosaic monotheistic revolution rather than the old idea of evolution. Scholars and textbooks alike spoke of subsequent, degenerate syncretism, or the mixing of polytheistic beliefs with pure monotheism, and this portrayal dovetailed with the rhetoric of the Deuteronomistic History as well as of classical prophets who called upon the wayward Israel to return to the monotheistic faith of the past and to create a just society. Such portrayals were used by Christian theologians from, broadly, 1945 to 1970 in the Biblical Theology Movement. This was a movement influenced greatly by continental Neo-Orthodoxy, which also reacted negatively to nineteenth-century idealistic liberal theology and simple evolutionary paradigms.²³ Central to biblical

²² Hillel (ca. 110 BCE–10 CE) is a famous religious leader associated with the development of the Mishnah and the Talmud.

²³ See Gary J. Dorrien (2003) *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism and Modernity 1900–1950*. Dorrien traces the liberal theology movement in America of the early twentieth century with its sometime emphasis on progressive social reform. He is highly critical of its overall historical subjectivism, especially the presentation of an evolutionary worldview. Dorrien argues that this

theologians who spoke of the Bible as a history of salvation or *Heilsgeschichte* was the emphasis upon a God who acted in the events of human history, such as the Exodus, Sinai, conquest, and the ministry of Jesus. Theologians relished the rhetorical contrast of monotheistic and ethical Israelite religion to the fertility religions of Canaan and the rest of the ancient Near East. George Mendenhall (1973) and Norman Gottwald (1979), with their paradigm of internal revolution, reinforced this notion of *Heilsgeschichte*. Gottwald's discussion of mono-Yahwism and the corresponding exclusive social and religious commitment to the Yahweh movement emphasised the contrast between the beliefs of Canaan and the revolutionary new thought of Israel in social-political and economic categories.²⁴ More recently, however, the *Heilsgeschichte* model has experienced a significant reappraisal and with it the Biblical Theology Movement (Albrektson 1967; Childs 1970; Saggs 1978, 64-92; Gnuse 1989).

Nonetheless, from the 1940s to the 1970s, biblical scholars such as Albright, Wright, Kaufmann, Georg Fohrer and Frank Moore Cross argued that Israelite or Jewish religious development evolved in progressive stages or leaps in the pre-exilic period until its culmination in the absolute monotheism of the Babylonian Exile (586-539 BCE).²⁵ From this portrayal, significant stages that scholars focussed upon included the activity of Elijah and Elisha, the message of the classical prophets, the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, Deuteronomic Reform and the oracles of Second Isaiah. This position would seem to mediate between Albright's idea of revolutionary monotheism and Wellhausen's gradual evolutionary model, suggesting a series of intellectual revolutions over a period of years that culminated in the exile. Many biblical scholars even use the words 'evolution' and 'revolution' together in their discussions. Othmar Keel and Bernhard Lang speak for instance of "a chain of revolutions which follow one another in rapid succession" (Lang 1983, 56; Keel 1980, 21). For them, monotheism evolves, but it is neither gradual nor inevitable. Rather, it comes in spurts as great religious spokespersons speak to a crisis. The greatest crisis was the exile, and it

undermines the work being done with regard to social reform by some quarters of the liberal theology movement, with more unsavoury aspects of out-dated "beliefs about the Christianising moral progress of Western civilization ... it made no reference to historical criticism or related forms of intellectual inquiry, or to the values and authority of individual reason and experience" (529). Dorrien's main research may be said to be located in the tension between Christianity and modernity, with an emphasis on the post-Kantian rational subject. See his *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (2012), and *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (2009) for extension of his initial critiques on liberal theology.

²⁴ Gottwald would go on to question the prevailing view that the Hebrew Bible should be the primary source to diagram the evolution of Israel's political history. See, for instance, his masterful *The Politics of Ancient Israel* (2001).

²⁵ See, for example, Albright (1957); Wright (1962, 99-120); Kaufmann (1972, 142-47); Fohrer (1973); and Cross (1973, 190-91). Robert Oden (1987, 429-47) noted that the strong emphasis on covenant by these theologians coincided with their early date for the development of monotheism.

understandably caused the greatest shift: radical monotheism, which categorically denied the existence of other gods.²⁶

These new theories concerning Israel's religious development have in turn been augmented by recent archaeological discoveries that attest to the diversity and complexity of Israelite cultic practice. This includes evidence of Israelite devotion to Asherah, the goddess of fertility, and to other gods of Canaan, as well as to so-called pagan activities like solar veneration, human sacrifice, and cultic prostitution. The most significant of these discoveries comes from Kuntillet 'Ajrûd. Approximately fifty kilometres south of Kadesh Barnea not far from the old overland route from Gaza to Elath, University of Tel Aviv excavators led by Ze'ev Meshel in 1975-1976 uncovered the remains of a caravanserai (and possibly a small fort) that can be dated to the first half of the eighth century BCE. For the first thirty-eight years after the excavation, these finds were published only in brief summary and in preliminary form (see especially Meshel 1978a; Gunneweg, Perlman and Meshel 1985; Weinfeld 1984).²⁷ Two inscriptions in early Hebrew and/or Phoenician discovered on pithoi (storage jars) and published may be translated as: "... I have blessed you by YHWH of Samaria, and by his Asherah" from Pithos A, and "... YHWH of Teman and by his Asherah" from Pithos B (Dijkstra 2001b; Keel and Uehlinger 1992). Many scholars argue these inscriptions indicate that Asherah was revered as a goddess consort of Yahweh by many Israelites as part of their normal piety (Meshel 1979; 1992; 1994; Dever 1982; 1984; 1994; North 1989; Margalit 1990, 274-85). 'Teman' may be a reference to an older wilderness station where Yahweh was worshipped, or perhaps the archaic cult of Yahweh originated there, and the reference to Samaria may suggest that many Yahwists believed in regional manifestations of Yahweh, as Canaanites also envisioned El (Ahlström 1986, 58; 1991, 128-29; Albertz 1994a, 83).

²⁶ See my Chapter Three for an examination of the exile and its importance for the development of monotheism as detailed in the biblical narrative.

²⁷ Given the lack of full publication until very recently – 2012 – and also taking into consideration the vigorous debate over the last forty years over what little has been published, this dissertation cannot document all views or findings, and so I here limit what I engage with regard to these materials. Meshel's (2012) 'final report', the *Kuntillet 'Ajrûd (Horvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border* will generate much interest in the coming years. The bibliography on preliminary reports can be found in Meshel and Meyers (1976) "The Name of God in the Wilderness of Zin"; Meshel (1976) "Kuntillet 'Ajrûd: An Israelite Site from the Monarchical Period on the Sinai Border", idem "Kuntillet 'Ajrûd – An Israelite Religious Center in Northern Sinai" (1978a), idem *Kuntillet 'Ajrûd: A Religious Center from the Time of the Judean Monarchy* (1978b), idem "Did Yahweh Have a Consort: The New Religious Inscriptions from Sinai" (1979). Significant studies include: Lipinski (1972); Freedman (1978/79); Weinfeld (1980; 1981/82, 237-39; 1984, 121-30); Beck (1982); Dever (1982; 1984); Emerton (1982); Lemaire (1984a; 1984b); P. Miller (1986); Tigay (1986, 26-30; 1987, 173-75); Hadley (1987a; 1987b); Olyan (1988, 25-37); Mark S. Smith (2002, 118-21); and McCarter (2009).

Another significant inscription comes from Khirbet el-Qôm, an eighth century site near Hebron in Judah, where a text reads, ‘Blessed be Uriah by Yahweh and his Asherah’. It, too, implies that Asherah is a deity, a consort of Yahweh, capable of imparting blessing (Dever 1969-70; 1994; Hadley 1987a; 1987b; Shea 1990; Zevit 2003; Lemaire 2006). These two inscriptions have been the critical pieces of information to make scholars suspect that polytheistic Yahwism may have been the normative pre-exilic religion of Israel and Judah rather than some syncretistic aberration (P. Miller 1985; 2000a; Hestrin 1987; Olyan 1988; Dever 1990; 1994). Some older archaeological finds lacking literary inscriptions are also now being interpreted in retrospect as evidence of a deeply ingrained polytheism among the Israelites. Two brief examples illustrate this proposed non-exclusivity of the Israelites. The first, colloquially referred to as ‘bull cult’ or ‘bull shrines’, is found in the highlands of Samaria from the early settlement period, particularly at Dan and Bethel where bamah (high places) devoted to bull worship were uncovered. The second example of non-exclusivity of the Israelites can be seen in the tenth century cult stand excavated by Paul Lapp at *Ta’anach* in 1968.²⁸ The finds at Ta’anach indicate that Yahweh was worshipped through the image of the sun and that Asherah was venerated in Israel (J. Taylor 1988; 1993, 24-37; 1994; Dever 1991, 111; Toews 1993, 50-51; Hadley 1994).²⁹

In the past, such archaeological data was considered testimony for syncretism between Israelite and Canaanite religions, but now scholars suspect that an early pure Yahwism may either never have existed until the writings of the Deuteronomistic Historians, or existed at best only among a small minority of Yahweh devotees. The

²⁸ The Ta’anach cult stand has four tiers and is one of the most iconographically elaborate stands discovered in Israel. The clay pedestal measures about 1.75 feet high and was probably used for libations or for offerings, although its exact function remains unknown. Two pillars frame the stand’s top tier which depicts a horse (often thought to be a bull) with a sun disk above its back. On tier two, growling lions flank two ibex that reach into a stylised tree. Two cherubim stand on the edges of tier three, with an empty space between them. Tier four depicts a naked woman standing between two lions. There are two griffins on the side of tier one. The images on the Ta’anach cult stand have recently been identified as representations of two Canaanite deities: the god Baal (the bull) and the goddess commonly known as Asherah (the naked woman). Conversely, J. Taylor (1988; 1993) argues that Yahweh – not Baal – and Asherah are the true subjects, making tiers one (a horse with a sun disk) and tier three (an invisible deity between two cherubim) the earliest known iconographic representations of Yahweh. Under Taylor’s interpretation, Asherah is understood to be Yahweh’s consort. The Ta’anach cult stand is housed at *The Israel Museum*, Jerusalem, and a photograph of the artefact can be found on their website with the caption ‘Pedestal for the figure of a deity’ (<http://www.imj.org.il/imaginer/galleries/viewItemE.asp?case=3&itemNum=362678>).

²⁹ It is worth noting that the archaeology of cult is a topic fraught with problems, procedural and explanatory, but excavations continue to reveal relevant sites, as in Amihai Mazar’s excavation of the so-called ‘bull shrine’, north-east of Shechem; Adam Zertal’s site at Mt Ebal, controversially described as an early Israelite sanctuary; Beit Arie’s seventh century Edomite shrine at Qitmit; and earlier, Ze’ev Meshel’s work at Kuntillet ‘Ajrūd. At the same time cult ‘furniture’ of all kinds steadily accumulates without any sign of a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of the primary implications for biblical studies. See Lemche’s (1998, 35-85) discussion of Israel in contemporary historical documents and archaeology from the ancient Near East.

consensus now is that the biblical authors condemned actual practices – practices that were not Canaanite intrusions into Yahwism, but rather of early polytheistic Yahwism. This suggests in turn that Deuteronomistic Historians projected the values of the reformed Yahwism of their own time into the past as a touchstone for critique. Although this is the emerging scholarly consensus, different scholars propose a multitude of scenarios for the actual process of development. It would be helpful, therefore, to review an array of these contemporary scholarly theories and their proposals of the conditions informing the development of monotheism. Although not an exhaustive summation, the scholars, positions and movements considered in a broadly chronological series in the forthcoming section have all been influential in the debates concerning the possible emergences – and histories – of biblical monotheism. This will make evident a problematic that will be further examined in Chapter Three, when I turn to unpacking the relations and tensions between the biblical texts and these kinds of historical interpretations, and will furthermore start to make visible some of the singularities and tensions that problematise any attempt to argue for a coherent and consistent monotheistic discursive practice.

Developmental Narratives of the Emergence of Monotheism

Denis Baly (1970) extends the argument outlined above that monotheism emerges not in the desert, but in urban settings in the midst of great intellectual struggles such as Jewish exile in Babylon. Baly offers a typology of monotheistic religious phenomena:

- 1) ‘Primitive Monotheism’ occurs among primitive agrarian societies when one deity is elevated well above the hierarchy of close, personal numina.
- 2) ‘Proto-Monotheism’ is found when political or cultural expansion has brought the intelligentsia of a dominant culture into contact with foreigners, and the intelligentsia synthesise regional deities under the aegis of their own national god. Examples would be the worship of Amun in the New Kingdom period of Egypt, Baal-Shamen of Canaan, Vedantic and Upanishadic thought in India, Persia before Zoroaster, Hellenistic monism, and Arabia before Muhammad.
- 3) ‘Pseudo-Monotheism’ occurs when a strong ruler tries to impose a form of proto-monotheism upon all his subjects for cultural solidarity. Examples would be Akhenaton’s cult of Aton in fourteenth century Egypt, the cult of Ashur in imperial Assyria, Roman emperor worship, and Sassanian Persian Zoroastrianism.

All three types reflect monotheistic tendencies, and are informed by the idea that an intellectual

breakthrough or paradigm shift is necessary to attain the pure monotheism secured in the Babylonian Exile.

Morton Smith (1958; 1963; 1968; 1971, 15-56; 1975; 1991) stresses in contrast that the ‘Yahweh alone’ party was a minority religious and political movement in the pre-exilic period standing in opposition to the royal cult and to all popular or familial forms of religion, which he calls the “common theology” (1991, 49). In his view, most Israelites worshipped Yahweh as their high god but were still polytheists; and a Yahwistic minority wrote the biblical texts and projected their beliefs into the distant past. Morton Smith hypothetically traces the development of the movement: 1) In the early years the cult of Yahweh was not distinguishable from typical West-Semitic religions. Each region had a national deity, and Yahweh was the national god of Israel. 2) The court of Judah from the time of David (1000 BCE) was responsible for popularising the worship of Yahweh among the masses. Prior to this time, the deities worshipped included El, Baal, Gad, Anath, Am Yam, Zedek, Shalem, Asher, and Tsur. 3) During the Omride conflict in Israel (850-840 BCE) Jezebel killed Yahwistic prophets, who must have been ‘Yahweh aloneists’, since her own sons bore Yahweh names.³⁰ The overthrow of the Omrides resulted from their foreign connections rather than from a desire to elevate Yahweh monotheistically. 4) Classical prophets and Deuteronomic Reform brought practical monotheism to the masses. Hosea appears to be the first ‘Yahweh aloneist’ (750 BCE). Even by Jeremiah’s age (580 BCE), however, monotheism still appears to be a minority view, despite earlier attempts at reform by Josiah (620 BCE), whose actions may have been more political than religious. 5) Finally, in the exile and post-exilic era, the people became monotheists, making a clear decision, as people surrounded by foreign religions, not to participate in foreign cults. In the post-exilic era, priestly laws separated the Judahites from others, encouraging pure monotheism.

Gösta Ahlström (1963; 1970-71; 1975; 1977; 1982; 1986) conversely observes that the biblical text does not testify to a ‘fallen’ version of an early pure Yahwism but instead reflects a natural state of religious activity. Asherah worship, the use of idols for other gods, and even the iconographic portrayal of Yahweh were normal religious

³⁰ The field of ancient Hebrew onomastics is characterised by its predilection for theophoric names, anthroponyms in which one component is a divine name. For example, El (e.g., Ariel ‘Lion of El’), Shaddai (e.g., Zurishaddai ‘Shaddai is my rock’), Yah (e.g., Jeremiah ‘Yah exalts’), Baal (e.g., Baal-zephon ‘the lord/possession of the north/hidden/secret’), Yam (e.g., Abiyam ‘My father is Yam’), Zadek (e.g., Melchi-zedek ‘my king is Zedek’), and Hadad (e.g., Hadadezer ‘Hadad is my help’). See my discussion on theophoric names on 84n38 and 129, and Paul-Alain Beaulieu’s (2011) “Yahwistic Names in Light of Late Babylonian Onomastics” for an overview of the use of Judean onomastics.

expressions for polytheistic Israelites. Israelite religion was one of a national cult with a high god, Yahweh, served by attendant deities, including Asherah, Baal (a name, ‘Lord’, used for local deities), Shamash (a Mesopotamian sun god, with variant solar deities Shemesh and the Ugarit goddess Shapshu), and Yareah (a Syro-Palestinian moon god). The religion was a state cult under royal direction, so that the emphasis upon the national deity was determined by each king. Hezekiah and Josiah thus simply elevated the national deity, Yahweh, for political reasons in Judah. Each shrine had a different regional interpretation of the Yahweh religion (Gibeon, Shiloh, Bethel, Dan, etc.), and Kuntillet ‘Ajrûd simply reflects one of those interpretations. Given that Yahweh worship came into Palestine with a group from Edom, the reference to ‘Yahweh of Teman’ at Kuntillet ‘Ajrûd implies an Edomite origin as well as biblical references to Yahweh’s coming from Seir (Deut 33:2, Jud 5:4). Perhaps Yahweh was revered first at Gibeon; then rose to prominence with Saul; and then was elevated significantly by David, who brought Yahweh to Jerusalem and merged him with El Elyon, a local deity. At Bethel, Yahweh merged with Baal, and elsewhere other deities were absorbed ultimately with Yahweh. Ahlström’s critical portrayal of Israelite religion reflects the general approach of many Scandinavian scholars.

Valentin Nikiprowetsky (1975), for instance, sees no evidence of monotheism in the ancient Near East or in Israel itself until the Babylonian Exile. Even then, many post-exilic Judahites, such as those at Elephantine in Egypt, were still polytheists (*ibid.* 1977). There were, however, preliminary stages which prepared for the emergence of monotheism: 1) Jeroboam’s division of the nation in 930 BCE indicated that Yahweh could be a national deity of the two nations, Judah and Israel, and this internationalism planted the idea of universalism. 2) Although Elijah did not deny the existence of Tyrian Baal or condemn other gods, he declared Baal’s impotence before Yahweh (850 BCE). 3) The universalism of Amos and Isaiah (750-700 BCE) further developed ideas which culminated in Jeremiah’s implied message that Yahweh is the only deity (600 BCE). 4) Second Isaiah declared most clearly that there is no other god than Yahweh. Importantly, the development of monotheism in Israel was inseparable from the vicissitudes of political experience. It was the crisis created by contact with the empires of Assyria and Chaldean Babylon – which succeeded in their political aims while the Chosen people³¹ suffered – that led to the development of a monotheistic faith. In

³¹ I deliberately capitalise ‘Chosen’ people throughout this dissertation to draw attention to a claim that is theologically grounded and to denote a special relationship between the Jewish people and God. It specifically refers to various instantiations of ‘Israel’ in biblical literature, and to their election to serve as

Nikiprowetsky's view, then, monotheism did not evolve naturally and inevitably. On the contrary, it was an exception in human intellectual history.

H. W. F. Saggs (1978) stresses the continuities between Israelite and ancient Near Eastern understandings of God and of divine actions in human affairs. He observes that pre-exilic Israelites were clearly polytheistic and that later biblical traditions were prescriptive, not descriptive, in regard to earlier beliefs: that is, they criticised as abuses those practices considered acceptable by the earlier Israelites. For instance, early Yahwists accepted Yahweh prostitutes until Josiah's time; the golden calves and asherah³² were not removed by Jehu after Elijah's revolution; and an asherah and a bronze snake existed in Judah's cult until Hezekiah removed them. Significantly, the plunder taken from Samaria in 721 BCE by the Assyrian King Sargon II included the gods in whom the populace trusted (the Assyrians knew the difference between gods and secondary beings such as cherubim). Many objects criticised and destroyed by Hezekiah and Josiah were traditional Yahwistic cult objects. This sometimes alienated the populace, as indicated by the speech of Rabshakeh in 2 Kings 18:22. For Saggs, then, monotheism emerged with the oracles of Jeremiah and Second Isaiah, where the image of Yahweh as cosmic creator with a salvific plan for the entire world reflects a response to the Babylonian image of Marduk as world creator. In Saggs' view, Israel articulated nothing radically different about Yahweh from other ancient Near Eastern religions; Israelite religion came to be unique only in terms of recognition of what God was not. God was not to be found, for example, in the forces of nature, not to be represented by human or animal form, and not to be conceived in a multiplicity of forms. The emergence of monotheism thus entailed the final reduction of conflicting wills in the cosmos to one divine will with universalistic perspective. The Jewish people, Saggs argued, made this leap of thought because their cultural experiences made them less respectful of the traditions of the ancient world and so more ready to generate a new intellectual synthesis.

Fritz Stolz (1980) believes that true monotheism is a total religious and cultural system and that for Israel it emerged only in the exile with Second Isaiah, although preparatory stages may be observed. Early pastoral Israel was not monotheistic and could not inspire later monotheism, since personal devotion by a family or clan to a single deity is really an attempt to use that deity as a mediator to a higher god. In a more

agents for God. In Chapter Eight, I reconfigure this theological choseness and gesture toward a new ethical orientation.

³² Lower-case 'asherah' here refers to various figurines and other ritual objects later ascribed as 'asherah' in cultic practices. Upper-case 'Asherah' refers explicitly to the goddess.

‘advanced’ society, Stoltz contended, a deity may represent the fullness of the pantheon, as with El at Ugarit or Anu and Enlil in Mesopotamia. Early Israel was polytheistic with Yahweh as one deity among others. Stolz describes several stages of evolution: 1) Elijah engaged in cultural conflict, not a battle for monotheism, for it was a struggle between rival deities, which really assumes polytheism. 2) A true anti-polytheistic reaction may be seen in the oracles of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, who attacked polytheistic elements in the cult. 3) Second Isaiah was the author of true monotheism, for with him the ‘moment of exclusion’ occurred when the existence of other deities was denied. 4) The Deuteronomistic History, which is post-exilic in Stolz’s argument, stressed the exclusive worship of Yahweh and a new social worldview. In effect, only post-exilic Judahites were true monotheists, portraying God as both a distant creator and an active personal deity, whereas polytheists would have pushed the older deity into the background as a *deus otiosus*.³³ As ‘true’ monotheists, they also sought to control the state in order to carry out the social implications of their ideology.

Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger (Keel 1980; 1997; Keel and Uehlinger 1998) argue in their turn for the great continuity that Israelite religious art and symbolism had with those of neighbouring cultures, particularly Egypt. The prohibition against images, for instance, did not prevent the emergence of a generous artistic tradition, including indirect portrayals of Yahweh as the solar disk.³⁴ This continuity with pagan artistic conventions leads Keel to suspect a greater connection with Canaanite (Ugarit) and Egyptian beliefs than previous biblical scholars had recognised. Keel thus contends that monotheism arose rather late and that Second Isaiah is the first true monotheist. Early contributions to the eventual emergence of exilic monotheism were provided primarily by the activity of the royal courts in elevating Yahweh to the position of being a high god in the heavens. Notwithstanding those contributions, the ultimate exilic emergence of monotheism was a revolution, rather than an evolution or any gradual, inevitable growth of ideas.

³³ *Deus otiosus* is Latin for ‘idle god’ and is a theological concept used to describe a creator god who largely retires from the world and is no longer involved in its daily operation. A not dissimilar concept is that of the *deus absconditus* or ‘hidden god’ of Thomas Aquinas. Both concepts refer to a deity whose existence is not readily knowable by humans solely through contemplation or through the examination of divine actions. The concept of *deus otiosus* suggests a god who has grown weary from involvement in this world and who has been replaced by younger, more active gods, whereas *deus absconditus* suggests a god who has consciously left this world to hide elsewhere. Martin Luther used the notion of *deus absconditus* to explain the mystery and remoteness of God in his Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 (1957b). The trope of God hiding is taken up in greater detail in Chapters Four, Six, Seven and Eight.

³⁴ For an examination of the solar elements and Yahweh, see J. Glen Taylor’s (1993) *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel*.

Conversely, Hermann Vorländer (1986) argues that true monotheism arose only in the exile and that prior to that time there was no real distinction between Israelite and Canaanite religion. The emergence of Yahwism, he argues, began with David's election of Yahweh as the deity of his dynasty, so that Yahweh became the favourite deity of the people during the age of the divided monarchies. At best, Israelites were henotheistic (which Vorländer defines as temporary devotion to one deity, usually during a crisis) or monolatrous (which he defines as continued worship of one deity); but, since they never denied the existence of the other gods, they were generally polytheistic. This polytheism is indicated, in his view, by the presence of multiple deity figurines in Palestinian sites; the many references in the biblical text to other divine beings; and the post-exilic evidence at Elephantine in Egypt that diasporic Israel also worshipped goddesses such as Anat-Bethel, Haram-Bethel, and Babylonian deities including Bel, Nabu, Shamash, and Nergal (all of which may reflect the deities worshipped in pre-exilic Judah). Israelites and Judahites hence arguably perceived Yahweh as a national high god, similar to the divine/monarch/land relation set out in the Mesha Stele (850 BCE) wherein Mesha pledges solitary devotion to Chemosh, national god of Moab.³⁵

Vorländer thus contends that true monotheism emerged only among the Jewish exiles in Babylon because they were an ethnic minority there, and so turned to religious self-definition to preserve their ethnic identity. He identified several factors as assisting in this transformation: 1) the cult of Yahweh was imageless and so was easy to transplant to a foreign land in rustic conditions of exile. 2) The upper classes of Judah were primarily deported to Babylon, and this group had a greater number of intelligentsia ready to make such a monotheistic transformation. 3) These people were receptive to ideas in the land of exile, which helped further their own thoughts. Babylonians, for instance, spoke of Marduk as a universal lord and creator; the Chaldean king Nabonidus elevated his personal deity Sîn (a god of the moon in Akkad, Assyria and Babylonia) in monolatrous fashion; many Babylonians exhibited exclusive devotion to Nabu (an Assyrian and Babylonian god of wisdom and writing); and later in the exile the impact of Zoroastrianism made itself felt. Second Isaiah was hence the first proponent of true monotheism. Since Vorländer dates all Pentateuchal texts to the exile and even later, he sees post-exilic monotheism in Yahwist, Deuteronomistic, and Priestly texts, all of which were inspired by Babylonian historiography.

³⁵ The Mesha Stele was discovered in 1866 at Dhiban in modern Jordan (the kingdom of Moab in the ancient Near East). The stele is housed at the Louvre and can be viewed at <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/mesha-stele>. On Mesha, see especially the collection of studies edited and published by Andrew Dearman (1989) *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*.

Bernhard Lang (1983; 1985; 1988; 1993; 2002) declares that Yahweh was merely a national high god, at times – usually in a crisis – elevated above the other deities. Originally, he contends, Israelite religion was a West-Semitic belief system whose clan deity, Yahweh, was raised to the status of a national god. This is his outline of the progressive development of monotheism: 1) Monolatry of a limited form emerged when Elijah and Elisha sought the exclusive worship of Yahweh as the national deity over the imported Tyrian Baal of the Omrides. The battle was between two groups of polytheists. At stake was the primacy of rival priesthoods and the economic implications of foreign priests and merchants imported into Israel along with close political connections to Phoenicia. 2) He describes Hosea as perhaps being the first person (750 BCE) to affirm ‘temporary monolatry’, or the total allegiance to the national deity in times of crisis. Ultimately, Lang suggests, this monolatry would evolve into ‘permanent monolatry’, with the deity worshipped exclusively even after the crisis had passed. 3) Hezekiah’s reign saw the Yahweh alone party arise to define Judah’s religious identity, especially with the creation of the Covenant Code in Exodus 21-23. Hezekiah even separated Yahweh from old legitimate images associated with Yahweh, such as the bronze serpent and the golden calf. 4) Josiah’s reform attempted to influence the masses, even to the point of using stern measures upon dissidents, and the agenda of this reform was promulgated in the book of Deuteronomy. Josiah attacked longstanding pious customs, including the cult of the dead and any teaching of the afterlife. He also attacked rival priesthoods at venerable shrines such as Bethel. 5) Finally, after 586 BCE, polytheism died, and out of its ashes arose a Judaism based on the beliefs of the Yahweh alone movement with new religious customs such as the Sabbath. Lang further sees Persian Zoroastrianism as a very significant catalyst for monotheism in Second Isaiah, describing the struggle for monotheism as continuing into the post-exilic period. According to this interpretation, then, Dame Wisdom, in the book of Proverbs, is an image turned by post-exilic scribes into a ‘school goddess’ – akin to the Sumerian Nisaba and the Egyptian Seshat – into a hypostatization of Yahweh to undercut further the cult of Asherah. Names of other deities, such as Shaddai, are also absorbed into Yahweh, and the heavenly host became angels.

Norbert Lohfink (1987; 1994, 35-95) argued that there always was a latent monotheism or monolatry in the polytheisms of the ancient Near East but that fully realised monotheism did not emerge until the sixth century BCE in Zoroastrianism, among the Greek pre-Socratics, and among Israel in exile. As he described the progression, early Yahwism was primarily a popular familial religion, and El and

Yahweh were merged in the minds of many Israelites from the settlement period onward. Yahweh merged with other deities because of his original lack of connection to other deities in the Canaanite pantheon. Josiah made Yahweh – who had by that time taken over the functions of most of the other deities – into the high national god of the state, replacing the earlier syncretism of many deities. During the later Babylonian Exile old oral traditions were drawn together to create Deuteronomy and the historical narratives, and monotheistic assumptions were then projected back into Israel's history. Lohfink also stresses that religious values arose in conjunction with social values so that Yahweh's exclusivity was connected to social egalitarianism and a struggle for justice, which culminated in the reforms of Josiah and the exilic literature.

Gerd Theissen (1985) suggests that monotheism emerged not as a simple uniform evolutionary experience. Rather, it was a revolution or, in scientific terms, an evolutionary mutation. (Theissen's understanding of mutation is rooted in contemporary theories of evolution, and he no longer relies on earlier understandings of biological evolution being a slow, gradual process.) For Theissen, then, monotheism is an evolutionary mutation that protests the principles of natural selection and the brutal competition between peoples, instead calling people to a universalism with a humanitarian ethos. This can be understood as the disjunction between 1) a biological evolution that proceeds with the selection of species via blind instinctive drives in a survival of the fittest, and 2) a cultural evolution – inclusive of religion – that relies upon human consciousness for cooperation, social interaction, and the exchange of ideas. On this basis, Theissen argues that monotheism emerged contemporaneously with the teachings of Xenophon in Greece, Zoroaster in Persia, and Second Isaiah. Before the Babylonian Exile polytheistic Israel worshipped El Elyon, El Shaddai, Beth-El, Baal, Asherah, and the Queen of Heaven. In the terms of Theissen's model: From 1200 to 586 BCE the exclusiveness of Yahweh was established; from 586 to 332 BCE monotheism truly emerged among Israel; and from 332 BCE onward a reaction against the philosophical monotheism of the Greeks led later Jews and Christians to declare their monotheistic revelations to be the unique manifestation of God.

Under this framework, significant pre-exilic contributions to the emergence of monotheism may be attributed to David, who made Yahweh a national deity; to Elijah, Elisha, and the classical prophets, who made Yahwism into an opposition movement to the state; and to Hezekiah and Josiah, who used exclusivist Yahwism for political reform. Throughout the pre-exilic era Yahwism was no more than a minority monolatrous movement that became a 'temporary henotheism' during periods of

political crisis. Continual crises led to what Theissen called ‘chronic monolatry’, which in turn gave rise to the ‘consistent monotheism’ of the exile. At this point, the exiles, who were upper class Judahites, began to view Yahweh as the creator of the world and as the director of human history. Hence, in exile, the old national deity of Judah became a personal deity for many individuals. In the later Hellenistic era the battle was over whether monotheism required conversion to a particular deity, and those who ultimately became monotheists realised that they had undergone a radical conversion (or mutation) to a new worldview.

William Dever’s (1984; 1987; 1990, 121-66; 1991; 1993; 2005) impression from his discipline of archaeology is that early Israelite religion evolved slowly out of earlier religious beliefs and that regional cult sites flourished at places such as Dan, Megiddo, Ta’anach, Tell el-Far’ah, Lachish, Arad, and Beersheba – each with its own mixture of Yahwistic and old Canaanite practice – until the end of the monarchy (586 BCE). These sites have provided hundreds of Asherah figures as well as moulds for producing the figures, offering stands for Asherah, and astragali for divination.³⁶ Clearly there were many different religious blocs, including the official cult, familial popular religion, the beliefs of the prophets, and the beliefs of the Yahwistic priests. Dever stresses the need to write a history of Israelite religion that combines archaeological discoveries with a critical analysis of the biblical text. Essentially his view is that the Deuteronomistic History and the Priestly Editors in the exile constructed monotheism and projected it upon earlier religion.

In his early writings Baruch Halpern suggests that ‘intolerant monotheism’ may have arisen late in the pre-monarchic period (1983a; 1983b, 246-49), but in later writings (1987) he contends that fully developed monotheism arose only in the exile with Second Isaiah. Inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrûd and other sites indicate that Asherah and other subsidiary members of Yahweh’s assembly were worshipped, except under Hezekiah and Josiah, as a normal part of Yahweh worship. Also accepted as a natural part of the Yahweh cult was human sacrifice. Halpern introduces some interesting categories into the debate.³⁷ Early Israelites had deep loyalty to Yahweh, but they were “not self-consciously monotheistic”; that is, they lacked philosophical

³⁶ Astragali (animal knucklebones) are found in tombs and stratified contexts throughout the ancient Near East, Anatolia, Cyprus and the Aegean from the early Bronze Age onwards. In spite of their common appearance in archaeological contexts, their function and significance remain unclear; however, it is likely that they served both secular and religious purposes. See Guy Bar-Oz’s (2002) “An Inscribed Astragali with a Dedication to Hermes”.

³⁷ As an undergraduate at Harvard in 1972, Halpern wrote a political analysis of the Bible, which subsequently influenced research into the Bible’s authorship. For an overview of Halpern’s contributions see Richard Elliot Friedman (1997, 43).

monotheism or perhaps were monolatrous henotheists (Halpern 2009, 87). This ‘unself-conscious monotheism’ contrasts with the “self-conscious monotheism” or philosophical monotheism of the exile (ibid. 88). Stages of development for Halpern thus include: 1) the xenophobia of Elijah and Elisha against the imported Tyrian Baal; 2) the critique of ‘inner-Israelite customs’ by the classical prophets; 3) the self-conscious monotheistic reform of Josiah; and 4) Second Isaiah’s separation of Yahweh from the world and any possible symbolic portrayal. This is an evolution from an early monotheistic set of assumptions, which were inconsistent and had occasional susceptibility to fits of intolerance, to a later more self-conscious radical monotheism.

Lowell K. Handy (1988; 1990a; 1990b; 1993; 1996) concludes that Israelites were polytheists who, as in Ugarit, revered their deities in a four-tiered hierarchical structure. At Ugarit the structure was as follows: 1) El and Asherah; 2) Baal, Anat, Shapshu, and Mot; 3) craft deities, such as Kothar-wa-Hasis and Shatiquatu; and 4) nameless divine messengers, the *ilm*. The comparable hierarchy in Israel was: 1) Yahweh and Asherah; 2) Baal, Shemesh, Yereah, Mot, and Astarte – all of whom were the gods condemned in Psalm 82; 3) Baal-Zebub, Nehushtan, and others; and 4) the host of heaven – also nameless messengers. Israelites were consequently polytheists, as evidenced by Solomon’s building of shrines to other gods that endured for centuries (1 Kgs 11:5-8; 2 Kgs 23:13). Even Hezekiah was a polytheist, closing shrines outside of Jerusalem, for instance, merely to protect statues of gods before the Assyrian advance.

Mark S. Smith (1987; 1994; 2001; 2002; 2004; 2010) argued that Israel’s religious emergence is really a breaking with its own Canaanite past and not merely the avoidance of alien Canaanite beliefs. According to his view, Yahweh emerged as the sole deity through a process of ‘convergence’ and ‘differentiation’. Yahweh converged with El, absorbed the features of Asherah and Baal, and at the same time eliminated certain practices in a process of differentiation, including the cult of the dead, child sacrifice, and worship at high places. Differentiation began, under this interpretation, in the ninth century BCE in the conflict with Baal. The later classical prophets continued this process by attacking Asherah, sun worship, and other practices to which they objected. Much of this process was part of the ‘natural’ elevation of a state deity, which may be found in other cultures. Since the elevation of Yahweh as the national high deity was undertaken by kings, particularly Hezekiah and Josiah, the state was primarily responsible for emergent monotheism rather than being the villain that sponsored state syncretism. Because Canaanites evolved into Israelites, Asherah, Baal, El, and Yahweh

were related integrally. From early on El and Yahweh were equated, and Yahweh began to usurp Baal's role as the warrior when he became the national high god under David.

The Yahweh alone party, which first appeared in the ninth century BCE, supported the state elevation of Yahweh. International political conflict created the image of Yahweh's power over other peoples, and this power reinforced the idea of universal rule. Adding to this trend was the tendency of prophets to attack customs that had been acceptable in earlier years, and the late entrance of religious influence from other countries made the prophets even more critical of old, indigenous cultic activity such as Baal worship. All these forces together, Smith has contended, created a monolatrous trajectory that came to fruition in the exile in the oracles of Ezekiel and Second Isaiah. Ultimately, Smith argued, monotheism arose as both an evolution and a revolution. It arose slowly out of polytheism (evolution) as Yahweh emerged from Canaanite roots and absorbed El and Baal, but it also differentiated itself radically from certain aspects of these roots (revolution).

Finally, in his grand history of Israelite religion, Rainer Albertz (1994a; 1994b) traces the development of 'familial', or 'popular religion' and its interaction with the official religion of Israel. He argues that the pre-exilic period had many forms of Yahwism (state religion, local religion, and family religion) that were subsequently levelled out by the texts of the exile and post-exilic authors. In his view, the 'popular religion' of Israel may be exemplified best in the familial religion of the Patriarchal narratives of Genesis with key features being devotion to one family deity, use of teraphim,³⁸ no extensive shrine cultus, occasional sacrifice, dream incubation, and a concern with illness, fertility, and descendants. This religion, basically polytheistic, was common to the entire ancient world. Yahweh worship came into the land, and Yahweh displaced El and took over Asherah, El's consort. As reflected in the inscriptions at Kuntillet 'Ajrūd and elsewhere, Yahweh took on different forms in the various regions. Monotheism thus emerged slowly over a period of years, as a result of many social and religious conflicts. In the early monarchy Yahweh was elevated as the imperial head of the pantheon by the state religion. The earliest seeds of true monotheism were planted first by Elijah and later by Hosea, who was the first to condemn activity within Yahwism, such as the bull cult. Hezekiah went further in reforming Yahwistic practices, cultic activity in shrines, and familial piety with the aid of the newly created Book of the Covenant (Ex 21-23). Josiah then brought monotheistic ideas to bear upon society to

³⁸ Teraphim were commonly talked of as 'idols' but I align myself with van der Toorn's (1990) position which refers to terephim as ancestor figurines and other such objects. Van der Toorn and I find 'figurines' less pejorative than 'idol'.

the point of closing provincial shrines and seriously trying to control the practices of familial piety. Deuteronomy reflects this theological agenda. Ultimately, Albertz suggests, monotheism prevailed during the exile when Yahwism was separated from state support and was permitted to emerge as a universalistic and monotheistic faith. Since the full development of monotheism was also connected to a fight against the emergence of social classes, true monotheism could arise only in the exile after the collapse of society with its attendant social structures and the political, national religion of Judah.

In this overview of the key contributions from biblical studies and archaeology to the debate regarding the emergence of monotheism, it is no stretch of the imagination to suggest that the scholars' proposals thus far discussed constitute a consensus, broadly speaking. They all argue, for instance, for some kind of evolutionary process that moves through various stages of monolatrous or henotheistic intensity in the monarchic period to a form of pure monotheism that arises in the Neo-Babylonian or Persian period. Although they primarily describe the process in stages of development, they nevertheless often stress the revolutionary nature of this trajectory. Specifically, they see monotheism emerge as a response to a series of conflicts or crises, when significant spokespersons articulated insights or undertook actions which advanced the Yahweh alone movement. These scholars also provide new concepts and terminology through which to describe this process, some of which will also inform my later discussions of the tensions both informing and deconstructing monotheistic logics in subsequent chapters.

Divergences

One serious challenge to this model has come from Jeffrey H. Tigay (1986; 1987) and Jeaneane Fowler (1988), both of whom evaluate Israelite names which use a theophoric element such as Yahweh, El, and Baal on inscriptions and in biblical texts. Their discoveries of a preponderance of the name of Yahweh in personal names has led them to conclude that Israelites for the most part worshipped Yahweh exclusively and were either monolatrous or monotheistic.³⁹ However, scholars critical of their work observe

³⁹ Tigay and Fowler reason that the lack of foreign theophoric names and the dominance of Yahwistic theophoric names in biblical narrative hinge on the 'popularity' of Yahweh and the lack of popularity of the names of 'foreign' gods. For Tigay and Fowler, if there was any widespread polytheism they would expect to find a large number of Israelites named for the rival gods mentioned in various texts of the

that their research indicates only that the popularity of Yahweh may have increased over the years, and that this popularity could arguably reflect personal or familial piety rather than the religious activity of society as a whole. Yahwism may be evidence for the emerging monotheism hypothesised by other scholars, the devotion to the national high deity. Also in many cultures around Israel the names of popular deities do not occur frequently in personal names, so that in Israel the names of El, Baal, and Asherah likewise may be absent in common names even if the Israelites were worshippers of these deities. These points, along with the presence of Asherah figurines, the presence of Baal names on the Samaria Ostraca from the eighth century BCE, and a host of images from recent archaeological sites make Tigay and Fowler's arguments for monotheism tenuous (cf. Olyan 1988, 35-37; Knauf 1991, 61; Dever 1994).

There is, however, a significant group of scholars who present a different kind of counter-position. These scholars propose that monotheism emerged totally in the exilic and post-exilic eras and that there were no preliminary stages of development in the pre-exilic period. Obviously, these scholars minimise pre-exilic contributions to the emergence of monotheism, viewing literary expressions of pre-exilic monotheism as the later creation of the Jewish community in exile and beyond. They are referred to as belonging to The Copenhagen School or as minimalist scholars. Niels Peter Lemche (1985, 386-475; 1988, 155-257; 1991a; 1991b; 1993; 1994; 1998), for instance, argues that the biblical text is itself a later post-exilic creation from the Hellenistic period after 300 BCE, and that the narratives are mostly fiction and reflect post-exilic politics and personages. Under this framework, although the biblical narratives set up stereotypical images of polytheistic Canaanites and monotheistic Israelites, the real religion of pre-exilic peoples in Israel and Judah was a typical West-Semitic polytheism. Worship of the god Yahweh came into the land in the early Iron Age, but most Israelites were simply the indigenous people of the land, and so their religion was essentially the Canaanite religion of the Late Bronze Age.

Hebrew Bible: Baal, Ashtoreth, Asherah, etc. (see, e.g., Tigay 1986). Fowler seems to go a step further when she concludes that the "Hebrew religion was so unique in that it was monotheistic, and no suggestion that it was otherwise can be gained from personal names ..." (1988, 313). Their approach to theophoric elements is consequently to count names. Tigay (1987, 162) nonetheless does not count seventy-seven names that contain 'ēl or 'ēli since it is not clear to what god this name refers and it may simply be an epithet for Yahweh. It is important to note, however, that approaches based solely on the popularity of a deity's name are problematic given the differentiation between popular religion and official religion. In this vein Susan Ackerman (1992, 1-2) stresses the point that while popular religion was the religion of the majority of the people, it was contrary to the religion of the scribes, priests, and prophets. See also Jacob Milgrom (1988) "The Nature and Extent of Idolatry in Eighth-Seventh Century Judah".

The Psalms may be useful for envisioning pre-exilic Israelite religion, differing from shrine to shrine regarding understanding the cult of Yahweh, with present Psalms reflecting the beliefs of Yahwists in Jerusalem, who standardised regional cults under the leadership of Hezekiah and Josiah (see Handy 1996, 27-43, n.9). In Hezekiah and Josiah's beliefs, Yahweh was the divine king of the city-state of Jerusalem, and the king was his adopted son. The covenant was merely between Yahweh and the king, and the land and people were blessed through the mediation of the king (as it was with the divine Pharaoh in Egypt). Yahweh was subordinate to El, equal to Baal (at times equated with him), and had a female consort deity. In this fertility religion Yahweh eventually emerged as creator, and the other gods became his servants, including Asherah, Shamash, and Yerach. The later prophets and Deuteronomic Reformers refined this religion to create an egalitarian covenant between Yahweh and the people, a new perception of Yahweh that stressed righteousness, and a fictional history of Exodus, Sinai, conquest, and even David. Their attempts created monotheism in the post-exilic era, and their written literature took shape only in that era.

Thomas L. Thompson (1987, 37-39, 193-96; 1991; 1992, 13-24, 415-23; 1995; 1996; 1999) argues that pre-exilic history or religious development of Israel simply cannot be reconstructed. Thompson maintains that the literature is a post-exilic fictional creation, although he concedes that some written traditions may come from the time of Josiah (620 BCE). For him, early Israelite religion was polytheistic, at best occasionally henotheistic, and monotheism emerged only in the exile. As he describes this history, the early roots of monotheism may lie with the classical prophets and Josianic reforms, but Babylonians and Persians both created the post-exilic Judean state by placing in Judah people who assumed the identity of Jews, even though they were not descended from Israelites and Judahites. These new, imported people adopted the existing religious and literary traditions and then developed them even more. Their religious synthesis reflects great Persian Zoroastrian influence. The high god of Syria, Elohe Shamayim, was identified with Yahweh, who really came out of the Israelite cult in Samaria, and further imagery was provided from the Babylonian cult of Sîn and Zoroastrian beliefs about Ahura Mazda. Essentially, Thompson argues, Jewish monotheism developed in the post-exilic era and had much less continuity with the pre-exilic era than typically assumed. Inclusive or tolerant monotheism emerged in the Persian Period, but truly exclusive monotheism or intolerant monotheism did not emerge until the Hellenistic era, at the time that the literature took its final shape.

Giovanni Garbini (1988) conversely suggests that pre-exilic Israelite religion was a typical agrarian religion in that it was polytheistic with strong sexual orientations. At best, it was henotheistic, with Yahweh viewed as the national high deity elevated only slightly over the other gods. Yahwism thus simply grew out of Canaanite henotheism. Later Yahwism in the exile and post-exilic era radically criticised and reformed that earlier religion. For Garbini, this entailed the fictionalising of a narrative history for the pre-exilic era so that even the post-exilic Ezra is a theological fiction. The oracles of the prophets were also revised by exilic theologians to generate ethical monotheism and related notions. Stories of Exodus and conquest, furthermore, were invented completely, and the first true theologian of the biblical tradition was Second Isaiah, whose monotheism was inspired by Zoroastrianism.

Proposing another interpretation, Herbert Niehr (1996) maintains that we must turn to Phoenician and Aramaic epigraphic sources from the first millennium BCE and to archaeological evidence from pre-exilic Palestine to describe the rise of Yahweh worship. Pre-exilic religion was simply another West-Semitic religion, and the ultimate movement toward monotheism was part of a great tendency in the ancient world. There were different manifestations of Yahweh in various cities, the most notable being Jerusalem and Samaria. In Samaria Yahweh was more comparable to Baalshamem (or Baal Shamayim) of Syria, rather than to the Canaanite god El, and indeed Baalshamem's role, 'God of the heavens', diminished in first millennium Palestine as Yahweh and other deities assumed it. For instance, Yahweh assumed Baalshamem's functions as presider over the heavenly council, resident on the great holy mountain (Zion or Zaphon are synonymous names for it), creator of the world, victor over the forces of chaos, and source of justice (a role typically assigned to the sun god). For Niehr, solar imagery was the truly significant contribution to Yahweh's persona, and the equation of Yahweh with Baalshamem was supported by the royal courts in Israel and Judah because of their extensive contacts with Phoenicia. Although the royal courts supported the amalgamation of Yahweh's persona with that of Baalshamem, this equation was opposed by the popular Yahwistic minority. This tension between the tendency to absorb Baalshamem's characteristics and the popular opposition to such foreign influence helped to create the ultimate portrayal of Yahweh. For Niehr, then, this transformation of Yahwism by the Yahweh alone movement occurred in the post-exilic period, when Yahweh became supreme and the other gods became merely angelic messengers. This post-exilic metamorphosis and reinterpretation of religious imagery is called by Niehr archaisation, re-mythologisation, and literary paganism, and occurred in

the Persian and Hellenistic eras when comparable ideas were emerging among other peoples.

Philip R. Davies (1992; 1998; 2002; 2011) concludes, similarly to Thompson and Garbini, that the biblical text provides us only with a fictional portrayal of Israel's origins, which scholars have turned into a 'literary-historical hybrid' by combining archaeological data with fictional narratives. Exiles who returned from Babylon were not Judean in origin but made theological claims in order to legitimate their rule and then generated the biblical literature. Old Israelite or Samaritan religion and the old Israelite identity were redefined and appropriated by these people whom the Persians settled in Judea. Biblical literature is thus a post-exilic scribal creation, produced at the request of the state, using little or no oral tradition, and drawn from the perspective of several post-exilic groups. Even Ezra and Nehemiah may only symbolise theological parties of the post-exilic age. Yahweh was a synthesis of deities from the pre-exilic age that included Elohim, Shaddai, Elyon, El, and an actual deity named Yahweh worshipped by some people. The biblical portrayal of Yahweh was created, Davies argues, in the Chaldean and Persian periods, when the idea of a single high god was emerging among other intellectuals in the ancient Near East. Yahweh was portrayed in the same manner as Marduk and Sîn were among the Babylonians and Ahura Mazda among the Persians. Finally, the biblical canon was created in the second century BCE in order to fight Hellenism in the time of the Maccabees.⁴⁰ For Davies, the Greek historian Hecateus of Abdera (300 BCE) may preserve traditions older than our biblical text, for he says that Moses, not Joshua, conquered the land and founded the state.

These various critical scholars from The Copenhagen School have thus proposed scenarios for the emergence of monotheism that move radically beyond not only the *Heilsgeschichte* models of the Biblical Theology Movement, but also even the emerging consensus of many other scholars. Receiving their best audience in European circles – especially among Scandinavian academics, among whom there has been a tradition over the past two generations to date biblical texts to the exilic or post-exilic eras – it seems doubtful, however, that these ideas will take root in North American circles. Their critical portrayal – displacing key monotheistic religious development to the post-exilic era and rejecting the reality of a pre-exilic history – will arguably be received negatively by scholars who have assumed that some historicity must lie behind the texts.

⁴⁰ The Maccabees were the leaders of a Jewish rebel army that took control of Judea, which at the time had been a province of the Seleucid Empire. They founded the Hasmonean dynasty, which ruled from 164 - 63 BCE. They reasserted the Jewish religion, partly by forced conversion, expanded the boundaries of Judea by conquest and reduced the influence of Hellenism and Hellenistic Judaism. See Shaye Cohen's (2006) *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*.

Furthermore, some biblically oriented archaeologists may not be willing to admit that their field research investigates the life and history of a people who have little or no connection to the biblical text. The Biblical Archaeological Society's (BAS) position regarding the pre/post exilic development of monotheism is an example of the tension that The Copenhagen School's position has engendered. Formed in 1974 as "a nonprofit, nondenominational, educational organisation dedicated to the dissemination of information about archaeology in the Bible lands" (BAS 2011), BAS publishes the *Biblical Archaeology Review* (*BAR*)⁴¹ which is geared toward "the academic study of archaeology ... to understand the world of the Bible" (BAS 2011). Whilst BAS is clear and realistic about its readership – a broad, general audience – its premise undoubtedly remains that the world of the Bible is true and real, and that every time an artefact is found and preserved it might further 'validate' an aspect of the Bible, confirming thereby the 'truth' and 'reality' of the biblical world. *BAR*, in other words, is reliant on a foundation according to which this 'history' actually happened.

Continuity with Canaanite Beliefs

Having so far traced some of the diversity of interpretations regarding the development of monotheism, it is evident that numerous specialised studies do conclude that Israelite belief had a great deal of continuity with Canaanite belief. One particular topic that has been of interest to these scholars is the identity and role of Asherah (one of the singularities which, I would suggest, can disrupt the smoothness of the canonised monotheistic discourse). A number of the scholars considered so far assume that the average Israelite considered Asherah an actual deity, a consort of Yahweh, and that veneration of her was acceptable throughout most of Israelite and Judahite history.⁴² Scholars are also quick to point out that in the ninth century, when Elijah, Elisha, and Jehu opposed the cult of Tyrian Baal and his Omride supporters, the cult and devotees of Asherah were not suppressed.⁴³ Some scholars even suggest that Asherah became Yahweh's consort when Yahweh absorbed the identity of El (who was previously

⁴¹ BAS also previously published *Bible Review* from 1985-2005, and *Archaeology Odyssey* from 1998-2006.

⁴² See, for instance, Ahlström (1963, 51-88); Morton Smith (1975); Lemaire (1977); Meshel (1979); Dever (1982; 1984; 1990; 1991; 1994); Zevit (1984); Lipinski (1986); Coogan (1987); Freedman (1987); Garbini (1988); Olyan (1988); J. Taylor (1988; 1994); Ackerman (1989; 1992; 1993a; 1993b); Margalit (1989; 1990); North (1989); Patai (1990, 16-58); and Day (1994).

⁴³ See Biale (1982); Saggs (1978, 22-23); Ottosson (1984); Freedman (1987); Olyan (1988, 1-22); Patai (1990, 29); Toews (1993, 151-72); and Hadley (1994, 242).

paired with Asherah), and that Asherah remained a deity for Yahwistic Israelites until the efforts of Hezekiah, Josiah, and the Deuteronomic Reformers meant that she was absorbed into Yahweh's persona and Israel as an abstraction (Olyan 1988, 38-74; Ackermann 1993b; Albertz 1994a, 194, 211; Day 1994, 184-86).

Scholars who have researched other aspects of pre-exilic Israelite religion also stress their continuities with Canaanite religion and culture, some examples of which are detailed below. Alberto Green (1977, 156-87), George Heider (1985), John Day (1989, 29-71), Susan Ackerman (1992, 101-63; 1993a), and Jon Levenson (1993, 3-52, 111-24), for instance, all conclude that infant sacrifice was an integral part of the Israelite cult until Josiah's reform, and that it may have involved the worship of an underworld chthonic deity of healing and fertility, Molek (or Molech), in a cult of the dead (the Rephaim). Christoph Dohmen (1984; 1987) conversely describes the rise of monotheism in conjunction with the evolution of a prohibition against images, an evolution furthered by the imageless cult of the early period, the intolerant monolatry of Elijah and Elisha, the internal religious reforms advocated by Hosea and Hezekiah, the systematic reform of Josiah and the Deuteronomists, and the final emergence of monotheism in the exile. As previously noted, J. Glen Taylor (1993; 1994) stresses the presence of a cult of the sun that was absorbed by Yahwism in Israel and Judah, but particularly in Jerusalem, in order to describe Yahweh as judge and protector of world order and to lend legitimation to the status of the king. John Day (1985) and Carola Kloos (1986) both conclude that the imagery of Yahweh's conflict with the primordial sea was significant in Israel's pre-exilic religion and that it reflects extensive Canaanite beliefs that became integral to Yahwism. Ernest Nicholson (1986, 191-217) perceives that Israelite religion grew out of the Canaanite religious milieu as a zealous monolatry arose which evolved into a strict monotheism, and this was spearheaded by eighth century prophets. Susan Ackerman (1989; 1992; 1993a) concludes that Asherah worship, fertility rites, child sacrifice, the cult of the dead, and the worship of several deities were practiced commonly as a normal part of Yahweh religion and that necromancy, child sacrifice, and fertility rites endured into the post-exilic era. Axel Knauf (1992) proposes that El was considered superior to Yahweh until Hosea, that Jeremiah was the first monotheist, and that only in the post-exilic period did Jews become monotheistic. Frederick Cryer's (1994) study on ancient Near Eastern and Israelite divination concludes that magic and divination in Israel were indigenous and commonly practiced rather than foreign imports, as was claimed by the Deuteronomic Historians. And, finally, there are many general studies and overviews of Israelite

religion and history that increasingly assume that polytheism was the 'natural' piety of Israel until the monolatry of the Deuteronomic Reformers and the monotheism of Second Isaiah. These works put forward that Yahwism was simply another iteration of West-Semitic religion (P. Miller 1985, 207-12; Weippert 1990; Berlinerblau 1993).

As a result of these arguments, many critical scholars now stress that emphasis ought to be placed on the continuity that Israelite religion had with Canaanite culture.⁴⁴ Further to this, some (e.g. Halpern 1987; Petersen 1988; Fishbane 1989, 49-63; Dearman 1992, 35-50) maintain that definitions of monotheism in Israel must be critically reassessed along with its emergence both in theory and in pedagogical literature. Indeed Michael Coogan (1987, 115-16) has proposed that biblical religion should be considered a subset of Israelite religion and Israelite religion a subset of Canaanite religion, so that the biblical faith may be seen as a construction out of the matrix of Canaanite religion. In addition, there has been acknowledgement of the significant connections between Yahwism and the religion of the Edomites, with arguments suggesting that the latter may have worshipped the same god as the Israelites (Bartlett 1977; 1978; Rose 1977; Ahlström 1991). Under this framework, the Deir 'Alla inscription from an eighth century Transjordanian site may reflect a form of Yahwism on the periphery of Israelite settlement (Dijkstra 1995; 2001a).

In summation, these critical scholars observe the following three key points: 1) that Israelite religion was part of a family of national cults found in and around Palestine, in which Yahweh was merely the national high god; 2) that Biblical religion is a subsequent interpretation of the broader polytheistic pre-exilic Yahwism, created by exilic and post-exilic priestly and prophetically inspired theologians; and 3) that Biblical religion demonstrates a significant evolutionary advance because of its conscious formulation by those theologians, even while it used the beliefs of the earlier religious phenomena. Nonetheless, despite these newer interpretations locating the emergence of monotheism later in Jewish history, the clarity with which monotheism and its related values appear still impresses scholars and students of intellectual and religious history. Indeed, for all of the scholars discussed so far, monotheistic faith is discursively positioned in the Bible as a breakthrough or culmination of the evolutionary intellectual and religious advance over the ages. The emergence of monotheism in the Jewish Babylonian Exile or post-exilic period reflects not only the final stage of six centuries of

⁴⁴ See the following works: Rose (1977); Dever (1983; 1987; 1990, 119-66); W. Schmidt (1983, 1-4, 138-40, 171-84); P. Miller (1985); Coogan (1987); Holladay (1987); Lohfink (1987); Peckham (1987); Flanagan (1988, 251-57); Hendel (1992); Berlinerblau (1993).

pre-exilic Israelite religious speculation but perhaps in some way the contributions of nameless thinkers from the ancient Near East for millennia.

The Bible and History

Turning again to the question of the relation between Bible and history, as distinct from more theological considerations, it is important to note that historians of ancient Israel and Judah, like all scholars, come to their work with certain presuppositions and goals in mind. These presuppositions and goals influence many aspects of their writing, from historians' choice of subject and modes of explanation, to their identification and interpretation of evidence, to the written form their final product takes. It is rare, however, to find an historian who sets forth her philosophy of research writing in detail, such a self-reflexive articulation – outside of explicitly feminist frameworks in which they are the norm – tending to be considered unnecessary and/or impossible:

Obviously no historian can be asked to make explicit, let alone embark upon a systematic personal study of, every term, concept, assumption and interrelation he employs. If he were, he could never accomplish anything. (Finley 1975, 73)⁴⁵

On the other hand, the presuppositions on which a work of history is founded cannot be ignored: "Understanding history ... requires that we grasp the range of assumptions which historians (and the rest of us) make about historical reality and how it is to be explained" (Gorman 1992, x). It is important therefore – both in the context of the previously discussed network of interpretations concerning the history of monotheism and for this dissertation more specifically given its engagement of Foucauldian insights regarding discursive practices – to acknowledge the importance of the assumptions about history writing that historians (past and current) of ancient Israel and Judah employ.

For example, the conflict between so-called 'minimalists' and 'maximalists' within the discipline of biblical studies today is perhaps one of the most upfront demonstrations of self-reflexive, socio-historical situated-ness in history writing on

⁴⁵ Finley's comments here are indicative of his socio-historical location (as are mine, of course). Post-structuralist theorists would perhaps read Finley and suggest he really is asking for it (trouble) particularly when he writes of 'accomplishing anything'. Post-structuralist tendencies seem to indicate that accomplishment is off the books and that we should be far more attuned to asking new/different/disruptive questions if we are ever to embrace more challenging ways of thinking and becoming.

offer.⁴⁶ This situation offers an excellent opportunity for analysis and critique since, as William Dray observes, “the presuppositions and conceptual frameworks of historians [are] often ... found to emerge most clearly where they cannot agree about what conclusions to draw” (Dray 1997, 765). In brief (and as noted previously), minimalists are scholars who generally distrust the Bible’s account of Israel’s past because they consider the text late, biased, ideological, polemical, and largely removed from the actual events and circumstances in ancient Palestine, at least until the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Minimalists would also argue that archaeology is a better source of information about Israel’s past than the Bible, and contend that ancient Israel and Judah should be recognised as only minimally important in comparison to the other cultures of the ancient Near East, about which there is now extensive material evidence to work from and cross-check. Maximalists, conversely, are historians of ancient Israel who generally do not adhere to these assumptions. Instead, they find value in the Bible’s accounts of Israel’s origins and may adopt the Bible’s basic timeline and paradigms as frameworks for their own work.⁴⁷ Although the Bible is the focal point of the opposition of these two approaches, the evaluation and use of the Bible are not the only sources of disagreement or difference between minimalists and maximalists. Furthermore, the issue of the Bible as potential evidence for Israel’s past brings into the foreground a number of related philosophical and practical concerns, many of which will be

⁴⁶ The ‘disagreement’ between minimalists and maximalists had a strong conduit in the now defunct ANE-List during the early to mid-2000s. Criticism against minimalists by maximalists was not confined to academic lists, for example, W. G. Lambert singled out Davies and Lemche in particular, writing that: “their ideology is redolent of postmodernism with a whiff of nihilism. They seem to be saying that the historicity of an ancient text has to be proved 100 per cent by irrefutable evidence, and that the historical books of the Old Testament are not history but ‘literary constructs’” (Lambert 2006, 362). The following provide the main trajectory of the debate: Lemche (2003) “Conservative Scholarship-Critical Scholarship: Or How Did We Get Caught by This Bogus Discussion”; Berlinerblau (2006) “What’s wrong with the Society of Biblical Literature?”; Hendel (2010) “Farewell to SBL: Faith and Reason in Biblical Studies”; SBL (2010) “Discussing Faith and Reason in Biblical Studies”; Thompson (2011) “On the Problem of Critical Scholarship: A Memoire”; and Atkinson (2012) “The Historical-Critical/Theological Enterprise: Why Are We Asking These Questions?”.

⁴⁷ *BAR*, a maximalist journal from BAS, has in the past invited ‘controversial’ minimalists such as Philip Davies to respond to the ongoing minimalist/maximalist debate. Whilst Davies (2011) entitled his response “The End of Biblical Minimalism?”, *BAR* preferred the snappier title of “A Minimalist Disputes His Demise” – the font of which was rather minimal, and had looming over it “The Birth and Death of Biblical Minimalism” in oversized multihued tones of finality. Such framing clearly poses questions about the openness and generosity of interpretation among academic stances held on the utility of biblical and other ancient Near Eastern materials for understanding and dating the Bible. Davies’ article in *BAR* was re-posted with permission from another website *The Bible and Interpretation*, replete with the usual website advertising from Christian Colleges and Universities. *The Bible and Interpretation* website also has a broad general readership but appears to differ in a number of ways from BAS. For one thing, it seeks to make a broad range of scholarly articles freely available to the public. They have a clear policy not to accept or publish the esoteric, improbable, apologetic or dogmatic in order to maintain their idea of openness to and within biblical interpretation, and they have a page listing and linking the twenty-four essays on minimalist approaches to interpretation at http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Minimalism_essays.shtml.

discussed in forthcoming chapters. At this point in the dissertation, however, there is a need to consider in more detail one of the main loci of gestation for these interpretations, the theo-political work of the eighth-century prophets – as detailed, for instance, in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Amos – as well as the complex theo-political processes which gave rise to a strong need for monotheism to be shaped and maintained as a doctrine. These discursive practices are the focus of the next chapter.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I have detailed some of the most influential approaches used to examine the Bible as history, along with some of their associated problems and debates. In addition, I have delineated the most common historical interpretations of the development of monotheism in the Hebrew Bible (also referred to as the Old Testament in some traditions), as elaborated across the intersecting disciplines of biblical studies, theology, linguistics, archaeology and history, further showing how these various interpretations inscribe their own epistemological traces into the work in their accounting for the very emergence of the work. As should be quite clear by now, this is a diverse and contentious field, containing positions on the internal versus external and pre- versus exilic-period development of monotheism. I have also worked to make apparent that these cross-cutting positions are all still caught in the forward pull of the quest for monotheism's origin, historically, geographically, and in its literatures. A caveat for this chapter is needed, however, before I turn in the next chapter to examine the theo-political work of the eighth-century prophets. This is that whilst I have set out in this chapter to delineate key movements in the historical interpretations of monotheism, this can be, at best, a selective sweep across the enormous amount of literature published on the subject since the seventeenth century. This chapter's delineation and examination of the problematic of evaluating the Bible as a reliable historical source for the development of monotheism also raises further questions: How are these interpretations interlinked with the biblical texts themselves? Are contentious claims about the fictitious status of this monotheistic history mirrored in the biblical texts? What is the status of the interpretative work of the eighth century prophets? These are core questions for the following chapter.

Chapter Three

‘Text’ and ‘Tradition’

Covenantal Obligation

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make a covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous. Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations ... I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring, after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God. (Gen 17:3-8)

This is the covenant with Abraham and, like the one with Noah (Gen 9:8-17), this covenant that binds both Abraham (and his offspring) and God to Israel is everlasting because it is grounded in the will of God and not in human behaviour. The above exchange – itself an event – between God and Abraham is also key to the fundamental significance of Abraham for the history, piety, and theology of Israel (as well as for three major Near Eastern monotheistic faiths down to the present day). It may be generalised that there are within this narrative two important elements of Israelite faith. The first is that the covenant is God’s initiative, that God has intervened in ‘human history’, and that Abraham has a direct encounter with God (and not a mystical experience). The second element is the setting of an eternal ‘covenant’ (בְּרִית, *brit*), established between a powerful God and the human beings who are chosen by this

God.¹ This represents an obligatory relationship between God and his Chosen people, one that is further sealed by circumcision, one of the signs of the covenant. The third element is the double blessings of descendants and land, and the entailing of a nation and a monarchy. That is, to Abraham and his descendants is given the promise that they will become a great people, the people of God, further receiving the Promised Land, the land of Canaan. Alongside these three crucial elements that guide the overall trajectory of Israelite faith in the Hebrew Bible is the all-important claim of God's self-disclosure to the patriarch Abraham. This is a self-disclosure that will re-emerge and be re-configured with Moses in Exodus, and later with David, and it forms an integral part of the emphasis on covenantal relationship between God and his Chosen people, Israel.

Biblically oriented interpretations of the One and Only God indeed constitutively include the formation of Israel, the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, the blessing of descendants and the promise of land.² These aspects seem irrevocably linked in a divinely consecrated, theo-political agenda that in turn sets the tone for the overarching narratives of the Bible (and for quests to discover the 'evidence' of biblical history).³ Regardless of the differences in literary sources, authorship and scribal culture, and the editing and redacting that have taken place, these fundamental elements are always drawn upon (P. Davies 1998; van der Torn 2007). Indeed, it is arguably this faith in the One God who is at work within history that ultimately works to shape a range of the theo-political traditions seen in the Sinai tradition and the Deuteronomic History. For instance, according to one narrative tradition of the Hebrew Bible – found in particular in Deuteronomy and in the work of

¹ There are a number of covenants in the Hebrew Bible: the Adamic covenant (Gen 1:26-30; 2:16-17); the Noahic covenant (Gen 6:18; 9); the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-18; 15:18-21, etc.), also reestablished with Isaac (Gen 26:3-4) and Jacob (Gen 28:14-15); the Mosaic covenant (Ex 19-24; Deut 11, repeated later before the conquest of Canaan: Lev 26; Deut 11:8-32; 27: 1-30; 30); the covenant with Pinchas (Num 25:10-13); the 'salt' covenant (Lev 2:13; Num 18:19; 2 Chr 13:5); the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:8-16), and 'others' (Jer 31:31-36; Ezek 16:59-63) that draw on the literary elements of covenantal theology structure. The Noahic covenant is unique in applying to all of humanity, while the other covenants are principally agreements made between God and the biblical Israelites. A covenant is an obligation of promise with the force of legality behind it.

² These key tropes – of identity formation, of divine blessing, and the promise of land – are later revisited when I examine how biblical texts cannot but deconstruct themselves.

³ When I use the term 'theo-political' I am referring to an interstice of theology and politics that informs matters of politics, theology, and culture. Theo-politics is a practice of the imagination (B. Anderson 1991). As the previous chapter made clear, we are often fooled by the seeming solidity of the materials of theo-politics, its armies and offices, into forgetting how these materials are marshaled by acts of the imagination. How does a provincial farm boy become persuaded that he must travel as a soldier to another part of the world and kill people he knows nothing about? He must be convinced of the reality of borders, and imagine himself deeply, mystically, united to a wider national community that stops abruptly at those borders. The nation-state is, as Anderson has shown, one important and historically contingent type of 'imagined community' around which our conceptions of theo-politics tend to gather. Thus, to identify politics and theology (or religion) as acts of the imagination is to recognise their historical contingency, and thus give hope that things do not necessarily have to be the way they are.

the Deuteronomistic Historian (Joshua-2 Kings)⁴ – and also retold in histories of monotheism, the biblical account of the history of Israel is marked throughout by a fundamental opposition between Israel and Canaan.⁵ Israel entered the Promised Land from the desert, bringing with it the ‘uncorrupted’ cult of Yahweh as its One and Only God. Having entered the Promised Land, Israel came into contact with the gods and goddesses of Canaan, a contact that ‘perverted’ the Yahwistic religion. The central implication of this version of Israel’s religion is that Israel’s religion differs from Canaanite religion and that Yahweh had nothing to do with the gods of Canaan.⁶

In this vein, the predominant narrative of the Hebrew Bible is an attempt to present an overwhelmingly early, monotheistic trope across the primeval materials,⁷ the patriarchs with their double blessing of descendants and Promised Land, the monarchy, and the exile. Those Israelites who stray from the covenant or who are ‘perverted’ by foreign gods and goddesses (or their peoples) tellingly precipitate a range of calamities that befall the Israelites.⁸ However, one other trope maintained throughout the Hebrew

⁴ See my footnote on the Deuteronomistic Historian (DtrH) in Chapter Two, 65n14.

⁵ “In sum, the Israelites may have perceived themselves as a people different from the Canaanites. Separate religious traditions of Yahweh, separate traditions of origins in Egypt for at least some component of Israel, and separate geographical holdings in the hill country contributed to the Israelites’ sense of difference from their Canaanite neighbours inhabiting the coast and valleys. Nonetheless, Israelite and Canaanite cultures shared a good deal in common, and religion was no exception. Deities and their cults in Iron Age Israel represented aspects of the cultural continuity with the indigenous Late Bronze Age culture and the contemporary urban culture on the coast and in the valleys. The examples of El, Baal, and the symbol of the Asherah illustrate this continuity for the period of the Judges” (M. S. Smith 1990, 7).

⁶ It is important to reiterate that the cultural and religious background of early Israel and Judah is, to a great extent, the Canaanite culture of the Late Bronze Age as discussed in my previous chapter. As far as it can be reconstructed on the basis of Ugaritic texts, the Canaanite religion was polytheistic. In view of the gradual segregation of the Israelite culture from the Canaanite culture, it is probable that the early monarchic religion of Israel was still polytheistic, similar to the older Canaanite religion. Archaeological evidence and vestiges in the Hebrew Bible imply that several gods and goddesses were worshipped in early Israel. Canaanite divinities of the Bronze Age, such as El, Baal and Asherah, are found in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the Hebrew inscriptions of the Iron Age according to many. For example, see Mark S. Smith’s (2001) *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, and my Chapter Two in this dissertation.

⁷ Within the Hebrew Bible the first eleven chapters of Genesis constitute the ‘primeval materials’. The phrase is used to demarcate the sense of human time that could be recorded (such as annals, chronologies, lists of kings or genealogies) from a mythical time. This was the time when the gods, or God, according to the myths of origin, created the foundations of the cosmos and human life. In these myths humans have no active part, which is clearly seen in the theogonies, combat myths, and myths of the divine origin of culture. See Helge Kvanvig (2011) *Primeval History: Babylonian, Biblical and Enochian* for an intertextual reading that offers a comprehensive analytic comparison between the images of primeval time in these three traditions.

⁸ As discussed in the previous chapter, this idea that the Israelites – meaning usually Judahites – were always essentially monotheistic was popularised within scholarly circles in the middle of the twentieth century by Yehezkel Kaufmann (1972). In the same tradition, see Irving Zeitlin’s (1984) *Ancient Judaism: Biblical Criticism from Max Weber to the Present*. The continued modern contrast of the monotheistic ‘Israelites’ and the polytheistic ‘Canaanites’ in Christian scholarship was largely influenced by Albright’s (1957) *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*, and his *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: a Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (1968). The idea that Judah was a monotheistic nation continues to appear in various works, although it has been noted that it is

Bible is that of the constant renewal of the covenant and the blessing arising from that chosen-ness by God. God is the centre around which everything plays out. For instance, in the scriptures of Israel, primacy is given to the Torah, traditionally called the ‘five books of Moses’. In the view of the community of faith, God gave *torah* or instruction to the people that they may properly serve God and live faithfully and obediently in God’s presence.⁹ This Torah has the form of an overall story or history, which includes the commandments or law, and God’s self-disclosure as creator and sovereign established as a) a general relationship between God and all human beings as made in the divine image (Gen 1:26-28), and b) a particular relationship with one people, whose election is portrayed in the calling of Abraham and Sarah to respond in faith to the divine promise (Gen 11:31-12:9), as well as in the choice of Jacob (later to be re-named ‘Israel’) over his twin brother Esau (Gen 25:19-28).

The heart of this narrative, however, is to be found in the tradition that begins with the book of Exodus. The disclosure of God’s name and identity here (Ex 6:2-9) is associated with fundamental experiences that constitute the Mosaic tradition, namely Exodus and Sinai. These core traditions, which work to signify the inseparable dimensions of divine initiative and human responsibility for salvation, are paradigmatic for Israel’s knowledge of who God is and how the people are to live faithfully in God’s presence. Here is presented the God whom Israel (the Chosen people) knows and worships, characterised as One, righteous, gracious, faithful, and trustworthy, but whose judgement also falls upon those who betray their religious loyalty and turn to iniquity (Ex 34:6-8). This presentation of God is further elaborated in the preaching of prophets, the teaching of priests, and the counsel of sages (cf. Jer 18:18). It is the intertwined biblical and historical narratives of this presentation – themselves some of the sources under examination by the historical interpretations discussed in the previous chapter – that are the focus of this chapter. More specifically, in line with my genealogical approach to these narratives informing monotheism, what is of interest to this chapter are the discontinuities or singularities that interrupt and disrupt the smooth progression of these narratives. This chapter thus marks my third effort at charting the attempted regulation of monotheistic ideals, identifying and mapping some of the implications of their sites of aporia.

only with the Babylonian exile that any form of religion that might be loosely called a ‘true monotheism’ appears in the extant texts. See Morton Smith’s (1971, 29-30) *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament*. Also note the survey in F. Stolz (1980) “Monotheismus im Israel”.

⁹ I return to tracing (and deconstructing) the interstices between God, Moses, torah (and Torah), law, and community in detail in my Chapter Eight.

Biblical Claims for Monotheism: Exodus and Deuteronomy

To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the Lord [Yhwh] is God [Elohim]; there is no other besides him. From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, while you heard his words coming out of the fire. And because he loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them. He brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, giving you their land for a possession, as it is still today. (Deut 4:35-39)

The texts in the Hebrew Bible generally present the religious history of the Israelite people as centered in the monotheistic belief in Yahweh from the earliest times ... [t]here are indications, however, that this depiction is a retrojection of a later theological situation onto Israel's earlier history. (Trotter 2001b, 125)

In its retrojective retelling of Judaic 'history', the text of the Hebrew Bible proclaims that ancient Israelite faith began with divine revelations from "God most high" to Abraham (Gen 14-15) and to the people of Israel through Moses (Ex 20). The understanding of the transmitters of the biblical text was that the Hebrew Bible uniformly presents one God as creator of the world and the only power controlling history. According to this understanding, references to other 'gods' are to non-existent entities or angelic servants of God, to whom humans mistakenly ascribe divine reality and power (see for example, *b. Meg.* 7b-17a). The Hebrew Bible commands the Israelites not to worship other gods, but only the God of Israel who brought them out of Egypt (Ex 20:1-4; Deut 5:6-7).¹⁰ It is worth having a closer look at these claims to monotheism as found in Exodus, Deuteronomy and Second-Isaiah.¹¹

The book of Exodus is named after the focus of the first fifteen chapters of the book: the liberation of Israel from Egypt by "the God of Abraham ... Isaac, and ... Jacob" (3:15). God's purpose in liberating Israel is expressed in a number of ways: in order to establish an exclusive relationship ("I will take you as my people, and I will be your God", 6:7; "I ... brought you to myself", 19:4), to make them unique ("my treasured possession out of all the peoples ... a priestly kingdom and a holy nation",

¹⁰ "We may deduce," Mach suggests, "that the sharp polemic against foreign gods has its roots in a social-historical situation where Israel is not really sure of its own religious-political identity" (1999, 25). These issues were a key focus for Chapter Two of this dissertation.

¹¹ There are other claims to monotheism, or variations of monotheistic tendencies throughout the Hebrew Bible. I have selected recognisable claims from Exodus, Deuteronomy and Second-Isaiah, but there are others scattered throughout including but not limited to Nehemiah, 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, 2 Kings, and Psalms.

19:5-6), and to “dwell among them” (29:46). Indeed, Exodus is inextricably tied to the provisions of the covenant by providing reason and motivation for much of what God expects of his Chosen people. In worship, the experience of liberation from Egyptian slavery prompts the Israelites to reinterpret ancient festivals, instilling them with completely new meaning: Passover (12:1-13), unleavened bread (12:14-20), and sacrifice of the firstborn (13:1-2). Likewise, in late biblical legislation, the Festival of Booths comes to commemorate the wilderness wanderings (Lev 23:39-43), and in post-biblical Judaism, the Festival of Weeks celebrates the giving of the covenant at Sinai (19:1). The central commandment, “you shall have no other gods before me”, is immediately preceded by the identification of God as the one “who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (20:1-3). The first commandment of the Decalogue, that Israel may have no other gods but God (vv. 6-7) is also worth closer attention. Here God identifies himself as the God who freed Israel from Egypt and prohibits the worship of other gods,¹² and stipulates that since he and no other deity freed Israel from Egypt, he alone is Israel’s God, and the worship of other gods is prohibited.

The obligation to worship Yahweh alone because he freed Israel from Egypt is the central doctrine of biblical religion in the Hebrew Bible, which is based on the ‘historical’ experience of the Israelites. The logic at work here is that of the covenant, the term used in verse 2 to designate the relationship established at Horeb (cf. Ex 19:3-8).¹³ Unlike the biblical quotation this section started with, Deuteronomy 4:35-39, the commandment “you shall have no other gods” is presented as a theological statement, although it does not explicitly deny the existence of other gods. Framed as a practical, behavioural injunction ruling out relationships with any of the other beings and objects known as gods, this prohibition – banning the worship of all but one deity – is a powerful statement in the historiography of religion. In practical terms, the command indicates that Israelites may have no relationship of any kind with other gods: they may not build altars, sanctuaries, or images to them, make offerings to them, consult them,

¹² See similar passages in Judg 6:8-10; Ps 81:9-11.

¹³ The concept of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel is modelled on ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties, in which a weaker king accepted a more powerful one as his suzerain, and possibly also on royal covenant in which a citizenry accepted someone as its king. Such covenants established relationships that were inherently exclusive: a subject population or king could have only one sovereign or suzerain, and ancient oaths of allegiance and treaties explicitly prohibit subjects and vassals from accepting another. See Moshe Weinfeld (1993) “Covenant Making in Anatolia and Mesopotamia”; and Donald L. Magnetti’s (1978) “The Function of Oath in the Ancient Near Eastern International Treaty”. The basis on which subjects entered into such relationships was the past benefactions of the king or suzerain to the subject, often his delivering them from enemies. See Judg 8:22; 11:8-11; 1 Sam 11:2 Sam 5:1-3. The covenant was thus an apt metaphor for Israel’s exclusive relationship with Yahweh because of the Exodus.

prophecy or take oaths in their names, or even mention their names. This is made clear in verse 9 and elsewhere.¹⁴

In Exodus, for example, ancient Israel are directed to have “no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3;¹⁵ Deut 5:7¹⁶); in Deuteronomy, the message is that “the Lord alone is God; there is none beside Him” (Deut 4:35¹⁷); in 2 Kings and Isaiah we find that “you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth” (2 Kgs 19:15; Isa 37:16, 20). The Psalms exhort, “You alone are God alone” (Ps 86:10); and in Nehemiah we read, “You alone are the Lord” (Neh 9:6).¹⁸ In Samuel and Chronicles we are reminded, “There is none like You and there is no God but You, as we have always heard” (2 Sam 7:22; 1 Chr 17:20¹⁹). Further to these examples attesting Yahweh’s uniqueness, we are also told that other deities do not exist: “the Lord alone is God in heaven above and on earth below: there is no other” (Deut 4:39); “There is no Holy One like the Lord” (1 Sam 2:2); “Can a man make gods for himself? No-gods they are!” (Jer 16:20); “All the gods of the peoples are mere idols” (Ps 96:5;²⁰ 1 Chr 16:26).

These claims of exclusivity rest upon Hebrew words that emphasise difference. A number of the claims rest upon words like ‘alone’ (לְבַדָּהּ, *lěbadd*) or the idea that there is no god ‘apart from’ or ‘besides’ (*zūlat*) Yahweh. Other passages take this exclusivity a step further and utilise discourse that denies the existence of other gods or

¹⁴ See, for example, Ex 22:19; 23:13; Num 25:23; Deut 6:13; 18:20; 1 Kgs 11:7-10; 2 Kgs 1:2-6. For ‘having a deity as one’s god’, see Gen 28:20-23 [cf. 35:1-7]; cf. “he will make thee into his personal god. He will make vows to thee” (*ANET*, 350b).

¹⁵ The first ‘word’ or the first commandment in the Christian tradition, does not deny the existence of other gods, but asserts that Israel shall acknowledge *no other gods* than the God who has liberated them. The ten words or ‘Decalogue’, are regarded as the epitome of the covenant obligations towards God and neighbour within the Christian tradition. Although there are Christian traditions which adhere to an interpretation that is premised on the idea that there are literally no other gods in existence aside from God, as I will detail later, there is also a growing tradition of interpretation, possibly arising out of post-colonial studies, that seeks to be less mono-centric in its acknowledgment of the deities of other ancient peoples.

¹⁶ This version of the Decalogue differs at several points from that in Exodus 20:2-17. For example, “You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third generation of those who reject me” (Deut 5:9). Punishment for sins against God here extends across three generations. This principle of vicarious punishment contrasts sharply with the Israelite norm for civil and criminal law, which restricts punishment to the agent alone (24:16). Later layers of tradition challenged this theological principle of divine justice (see 7:10; Jer 31:29-30; Ezek 18).

¹⁷ This affirmation of full monotheism (contrast v.7; 5:7) corresponds to the thought of the exilic Second Isaiah (Isa 43:10-13; 44:6-8; 45:6-7, 22).

¹⁸ It is worth noting that in the Christian version(s), this verse begins “And Ezra said”. This is not found in the Hebrew version of the text where Ezra’s role concluded when he placed the Torah into the care of the community (8:13), and trained others to guide the community accordingly.

¹⁹ The Chronicler here affirms the incomparability of Yahweh (cf. Jer 10:7) and monotheism as well (cf. 1 Sam 2:2; Isa 64:4). This is the only explicit statement of monotheism in Chronicles.

²⁰ In contrast to the previous Psalm, all nations are called upon to enthrone God as the sole, universal God. *Tanakh* translates Psalm 96:5 as “For all the gods of the peoples are *nothings*” (*Tanakh* 1996, italics mine).

acts to reduce them to ‘not’ (אֵין, *’ēn*), ‘nothings’ (*’ēlîlîm*), or the ‘dead’ (*mētrîm*).

Deuteronomistic religious polemics deploy words emphasising difference such as ‘vanity’ (הַבִּלְבָּל, *hebelîm*), which is used to indicate ‘vapour’ or ‘nullity’.²¹ It is characteristic of the Yahwistic religion of ancient Israel to designate ‘other deities’ in a disparaging way. This has no counterpart in other ancient Near Eastern cultures; the Assyrians, for instance, depict deities of the people conquered as “their deities” or “the gods in which they trusted” (Becking 1992, 31); they consider them to be real deities and not mere idols or ‘nothings’. The category of language used in Yahwism conversely denies the reality of other deities, perhaps in order to bolster the significance of Yahweh. Such denial of the reality of ‘other deities’ certainly stands in contrast to the everlasting character of Yahweh and this religious polemic is taken up strongly in Jeremiah. Finally, there are passages that condemn the veneration of other deities without commenting on their existence, for example, Exodus 20:3 and Deuteronomy 5:7; 32:12, 15b-21, and 37-39. The iconic *Shema* (from Deut 6:4) might also find a place in this particular category.²²

Questions arise, however: Why did monotheistic statements promoting Yahweh emerge in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE? What specifically was it about these times that provided the impetus to create and maintain this type of theo-political discourse? Why did Judeans express this vision of Yahweh during the late Davidic monarchy and the exile? One possible response to these questions, prefaced in the preceding chapter, can be found in the fraught political and religious environments of ancient Israel and Judah. It is worth further describing the tumultuous political and religious environment that contributed to the development and maintenance of the monotheistic tendencies that are played out in the Hebrew Bible, in order to better understand the complex and problematic nature of biblical texts.

The Divided Monarchies (ca. 928 to the Late Seventh Century BCE)

The death of Solomon inaugurated the period of the divided monarchy, the two kingdoms of Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The dynasty that David had established (ca. 1000 BCE) remained in power in Judah for nearly four centuries, while Israel was ruled by a succession of royal families, many of whose rulers came to power

²¹ See Deut 32:21; 1 Kgs 16:13, 26; 2 Kgs 17:15; 8 times in Jer; Zech 10:2; cf. Ps 31:7 and Jona 2:9).

²² I engage with the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 throughout this dissertation.

in military coups. With regards to religion, linguistic data attesting worship of Yahweh comes from both the northern and southern kingdoms.²³ Yahweh appears to have been a national or ethnic god,²⁴ much as Chemosh was the god of the Moabites, Quas the god of the Edomites, and so on (cf. 1 Kgs 11:33). This does not mean that Yahweh was the only god worshipped in these kingdoms but, as his is the name most widely attested, he appears to have been the main object of devotion both theo-politically and in terms of popular religion.²⁵

Politically, the two kingdoms had mixed relations, sometimes amicable, sometimes hostile. Neither was able to control effectively the regions that bordered them, and the Davidic Empire, such as it was, ceased to exist. Changes in the larger international scene also increasingly affected these two kingdoms. Pressure from a revived Egypt is evident in the campaign of Shishak to the north in 925 BCE. Meanwhile, in northern Mesopotamia, the kingdom of Assyria had consolidated its control over Babylon in the south and adjacent regions in the north and east, and by the ninth century was poised to expand into the Levant. At this point, the reasonably complete Assyrian annals enable the construction of a relatively exact chronology and

²³ Outside the biblical text, the name Yahweh is (thus far) first clearly attested in the Moabite stone or Mesha Stele from the ninth century BCE where Mesha took Nebo from Israel and dedicated the “vessels of Yhwh” (כְּלֵי יְהוָה, *kly Yhwh*) to his god Chemosh. The dating cited herein follows the ‘Chronological Table for Palestinian/Israelite Archaeology in the Second and First Millennia’ in Keel and Uehlinger (1998, 410). It should be noted that the ongoing and complicated debate on chronology is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The earliest mention of Yahweh as the official god of Israel outside of biblical sources is found in the Victory Stele supposedly written by Mesha, the Moabite ruler from the ninth century BCE. The stele details a successful Moabite military campaign against Israel in the time of Ahab. Two earlier texts that mention Yahweh are Egyptian from the reign of Amenophis III in the first part of the fourteenth century BCE, and from Ramses II in the thirteenth century BCE. The texts speak of a “Yahu in the land of the Shosu-bedouins” (see van der Toorn 1999, 911; Johannes de Moor 1990, 111). In these texts, Yahweh is not connected with the ‘Israelites’ and the deity’s cult is not situated in Palestine. The texts and their implications continue to be hotly debated. Among the Khirbet Beit Lei inscriptions (ca. 600 BCE) is a reference to a Yahweh who is apparently the god of Jerusalem. The words “Yhwh god of” (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי, *Yhwh ’lhy*) and “Jerusalem” are visible (Cross 1970, 299-306; Lemaire 1976, 558-68; G. Davies 1991). The name is also found on a seal from the early eighth century allegedly found in Jerusalem, which reads “Miqneyaw servant of Yhwh” (מִקְנֵיאוֹ עַבְדֵּי יְהוָה, *Mqnyw ‘bd Yhwh*) (Avigad and Sass 1997). The ostraca from Arad dated to ca. 600 BCE contain a number of blessings and invocations in the name of Yahweh (Lindenberger 2003). There is also a reference to the “house of Yhwh” (בֵּית יְהוָה, *byt Yhwh*) that is probably a local temple (Arad 18 (IM 67-6999) in Lindenberger 2003, 121). The Lachish Ostraca, also evidently from the last days of the kingdom of Judah, contains a number of invocations using the name of Yahweh (“may Yhwh give health/good news”; “as Yhwh lives”) (Lachish 2 (BM 125 702); 3 (IM 38-127); 4 (IM 38-128); 5 (BM 125 703); 6 (IM 38-129); and 9 (BM 125 705) in Lindenberger 2003, 124-131).

²⁴ The question of where Yahweh originates has been a matter of intense debate with various claims to find the name in Ugarit, Mesopotamia and even Ebla. None of this has so far withstood scrutiny to general satisfaction. However, some Egyptian inscriptions of the Late Bronze Age mention what may be a geographical name Yhwh, with reference to “the land of the Shasu Yahu” (Redford 1992, 271-75; *contra* Ahlström 1993, 277-78).

²⁵ For overviews on popular religion in ancient Israel, see Susan Ackerman (1992, 214) *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah*; and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith (1992) *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*.

provide numerous synchronisms with biblical texts. Beginning with Ahab, king of Israel in the mid-ninth century, many of the rulers of both Israel and Judah are mentioned in Assyrian sources, an indication of the growing Assyrian interest in the region.

The Assyrians were establishing an empire, a process that reached its zenith with the Assyrian king Esarhaddon's subjugation of Egypt in 671 BCE. They accomplished this by virtue of a technologically sophisticated army that in relatively rapid advance overwhelmed the smaller kingdoms of Syria and Palestine, usually incorporating their territories into the empire as provinces and deporting the elite of their populations to other regions. By the late eighth century this subjugation was virtually complete. The Syrian kingdoms had been taken, including that of the Arameans in Damascus in 732 BCE. In 722 BCE Samaria fell, its ruling class was exiled to Assyria, and the northern kingdom of Israel became an Assyrian province. Judah's territory was curtailed but, in part because of the remote location of Jerusalem, was allowed to exist in vassal status. Toward the end of the eighth century the Judean king Hezekiah attempted to reassert Judean independence but was quashed by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in a campaign (701 BCE) well documented in both biblical and Assyrian sources, where Jerusalem avoided destruction by payment of a heavy tribute. Beginning with Amos and Hosea in the mid-eighth century, the prophets, and later the authors of the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua - 2 Kings), interpreted these events as a deserved punishment inflicted by Yahweh on his rebellious people.²⁶ For them, the repeated experiences of attack, siege, and exile were ultimately caused not by the inexorable progress of the Assyrian armies but by divine agency, imposing the fulfilment of curses attached to the covenant for a wayward people.

End of the Kingdom of Judah (Late Seventh to Early Sixth Centuries BCE)

By the late seventh century, the Assyrian Empire was overextended and was unable to prevent first independence and eventually overthrow by a resurgent Babylonia to its south. The Babylonians captured the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 612 BCE, and in effect took over the Assyrian Empire. In the initial years, Egypt and Judah attempted to take advantage of the transfer of power by reasserting their independence. This was the time of the reign of the Judean king Josiah (640-609 BCE), whom biblical sources

²⁶ See the State Archives of Assyria (SAA), the State Archives of Assyria Bulletin (SAAB), the State Archives of Assyria Online (SAAO), and The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.

compare to David and whose accomplishments are magnified like those of his predecessor.²⁷ While it seems likely that Judah was able to re-establish control over some of the north and west that had been under direct Assyrian rule, its autonomy, such as it was, was short-lived. After Josiah's death at the battle of Megiddo in 609 BCE, in a failed attempt to prevent the Egyptians from moving north to reinforce the Assyrians, Judah was again reduced to the status of a vassal, first to Egypt, and then, by the end of the seventh century, to Babylon. Caught between two greater powers, the Judean kings Jehoiakim and Zedekiah successively allied themselves with Egypt, which proved to be the weaker partner. Under Nebuchadnezzar (or Nebuchadrezzar) II, the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem in 597 BCE and 586 BCE, in the second instance destroying the city and ending the Davidic dynasty. Despite the extravagant propaganda of the royal establishment, neither the Davidic dynasty nor its capital city was impregnable. Jerusalem was destroyed, its dynastic Temple burned, and much of its population decimated by death and exile. Autonomous control of the 'Promised Land' became only a memory, and despite partial restoration later in the sixth century, exile in Babylon greatly transformed the religion of Judah – Judaism. From this point on, a significant number of Jews would be living outside the 'Promised Land', without king, Temple, or priesthood.

The Persian Period (539-333 BCE)

The Babylonian exile and the period of the Persian domination that followed was a time of great transformation for Judean institutions, religious practices, and culture, but it was equally a time in which the fundamental continuity with pre-exilic traditions was reaffirmed and secured. When Nebuchadnezzar put down the rebellion of Judah in 586 BCE, he exiled to Babylon a portion of the population, including the ruling class and

²⁷ Josiah deliberately pursued theocracy as a means of holding his fragmented people together. Specifically, he instituted the Deuteronomic Reform. As part of this reform, he destroyed Solomon's shrines to gods now identified as foreign and dismantled state shrines in the countryside. This campaign against the ancestral cult included tomb desecration and the exposure of ancestral bones (Bloch-Smith 1992). A term previously reserved for the ancestors, *Rephaim*, was now applied to the indigenous Canaanites allegedly proscribed by Yahweh (van der Toorn, Becking and van der Horst eds. 1999; Shipp 2002). Deuteronomy also saw the legal programme of Josiah's court or of a later extension of it, enjoin the worship of Yahweh alone. Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah explicitly identified the host of heaven as foreign, as objects of apostasy. The 'Priestly source' of the Pentateuch rewrote the traditional ancestral lore, suppressing most references to superhuman agencies other than Yahweh; it forbids any imagery in the cult – correspondingly, seals become increasingly aniconic.

skilled artisans.²⁸ Most, however, remained in Judah where a subsistence economy was soon re-established. Although the system of regular sacrifices at the Temple was disrupted, the ruined Temple remained a focus for religious observances. The book of Lamentations may preserve liturgical poems used on days commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. Little is known about the circumstances of those who went into exile, although it appears that they were settled in a number of local communities in Babylonia, where they were able to oversee their own internal and cultural affairs under the leadership of Jewish elders and prophets (see Ezek; Isa 40-55). Significantly, it is this exile that sees the adoption of a One-God theology²⁹ dramatically declared throughout Second Isaiah.

It is, however, too simple to frame the emergence of exclusive monotheism in Israel solely in the terms of the Babylonian exile. The expulsion of lesser gods among the Jews began a century earlier during the reign of King Josiah, usually dated from 640-609 BCE. The Deuteronomic reform that Josiah initiated under the threat of the Assyrian empire not only laid the groundwork for a theology that more tightly linked the kingdoms of Judah and Israel to each other through the sharing of exclusive worship of one deity, but also consolidated power.³⁰ Later, with Assyria declining on one side, and Babylonia beginning to rise on another, Josiah pursued theocracy as a way of holding together his own somewhat fragmented people in a small kingdom that, he hoped, would manage to stay afloat through the clashes of empire surrounding it. But, of course, the consolidated Israel could not finally fend Babylon off, and in three sweeps between 597 and 537 BCE when Cyrus II of Persia brought the Babylonian empire to ruin, thousands of Jewish leaders, scholars, land-holders and priests were forced into exile.

The conquest of Babylon by the Persian king Cyrus the Great in 539 BCE brought significant changes. In keeping with his policy of respecting various deities worshipped throughout the empire, a decree by Cyrus in 538 BCE (see Ezra 1:1-4; 6:1-

²⁸ Unlike chapters 1-39, which are traditionally attributed to Israelite authorship of the late eighth century BCE, chapters 40-55 of Second Isaiah are believed to be a collection of speeches of the mid sixth century BCE, "Delivered to the Jews who had been deported to Babylon from their native Judah a half century earlier" (Clifford 1984, 3).

²⁹ According to Halpern (1987, 79), Israel's eventual development of a strong, even intolerant monotheism by the time that Second Isaiah was written (ca. 540-520 BCE) is unquestioned. Not all, of course, agree in the details. "Albright speaks of a Mosaic age of monotheism deriving from the Sinai experience. Gottlieb, Morton Smith, Lang, and P. K. McCarter note the role of the monarchy in the development of the 'Yahweh-only party' in the ninth century and afterward. Lang especially emphasises the 'prophetic minority' that provided initial support for this religious posture in the northern kingdom before its fall and later in the southern kingdom. Many commentators attach great importance to the Exile as the formative period for the emergence of Israelite monotheism" (M. S. Smith 1990, 154).

³⁰ Juha Pakkala (1999, 238) notes that the strict intolerance toward other gods takes place in advance of the articulation of monotheism as a concept.

5) authorised the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem and the return of the Temple vessels captured by Nebuchadnezzar. In addition, Cyrus allowed any of the exiles who wished to return to Judah to do so.³¹ Within the exilic community in Babylon the anonymous prophet known as ‘Second Isaiah’ (Isa 40-55) strongly supported Cyrus and urged exiles to return to Judah. Although historical sources are few and not always easy to interpret, it appears that only a small minority of the exiles and their descendants returned to Judah, most choosing to remain in Babylonia. This latter group became the nucleus of a large and highly significant Jewish Diaspora community that strongly influenced the development of Judaism and Jewish culture during the following centuries.

Despite the decree of Cyrus, the Temple in Jerusalem was not rebuilt until 520-515 BCE. Persian control over the western territories may actually have been tentative until after the Persians conquered Egypt in 525 BCE. The province of Yehud (the name by which the Persian province of Judah was known) was very small, consisting of Jerusalem and the surrounding territory within a radius of approximately 32 kilometres, and its economy was weak. There also appears to have been friction between the population that had remained in the land and the small but powerful group who returned from exile with the authorisation and financial backing of the Persian king. Conflicts with the neighbouring territories of Samaria and Geshur and Ammon in Transjordan also complicated the political situation. These issues are referred to within the biblical prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah – portions of Ezra 1-6 also refer to this period – but these sources should be read and interpreted critically, for they are neither consistent with one another nor easy to understand on their own terms. During the early part of Persian rule the governors of Yehud appear to have been prominent figures from the Diaspora community, one of whom, Zerubbabel, was a member of the Davidic royal family.

Once the Temple was rebuilt, it became the nucleus of the restored community and consequently a focus of conflict (Isa 56-66; Malachi). The high priestly family, which had also returned from the Diaspora, became very powerful, and on at least one occasion was in conflict with the governor appointed by the Persian king. Although the details are often not clear, there appears to have been continuing conflict during the fifth century between those Jews whose ancestors had been in exile and those whose ancestors had remained in the land. Those who returned from the exile styled

³¹ See Trotter (2001a; 2001b), Bedford (1995) and Edelman (2005) for discussions surrounding the delay in returning from exile and rebuilding the Jerusalem temple.

themselves ‘the children of the exile’ and referred rather contemptuously to the rest as ‘people of the land’ as though their very status as Jews was in question. The questions of the limits of the community was one of the most contentious issues of the period, reflected both in the controversy over mixed marriages between Jewish men and ethnically foreign women (Ezra 10; Neh 13), and also in conflicts within the Jewish community over who had the right to claim the traditional identity as descendants of Abraham and Israel (see Isa 63:16 and more generally Third-Isaiah, Isa 56-66). Although the conflicts between various contending groups in early Persian Period Yehud are largely cast in religious terms, there is no question that they were also in part socio-economic (see Neh 5). All of these conflicts and efforts towards redefinition of the community, however, took place within the reality of Persian imperial control. Thus, it is not by accident that the two prominent figures involved in various reforms of mid-fifth century Yehud, Ezra and Nehemiah, were Diaspora Jews of high standing, carrying out tasks that had been specifically authorised by the Persian kings.

This was a period of self-conscious reconstruction. It was also a time of immense literary activity, as traditional materials were collected, revised, and edited and new works composed. Although much of the Pentateuch may have existed in various forms during the time of the monarchy, it was probably reworked during the Persian Period (539/500-323 BCE) into something close to its final form (Watts 2001). Indeed, some have suggested that this revision may have been undertaken under the sponsorship of the Persian government, reflecting Persia’s interest in achieving stability throughout its empire by means of religious and legal reforms in the provinces (Ahlström 1982; Hoglund 1992; Berquist 1995; Becking and Korpel eds. 1999; Frei 2001; Albertz and Becking eds. 2003). Although a history of Israel and Judah – known as the Deuteronomistic History as found in Deuteronomy through 2 Kings – had been composed during the latter years of the monarchy and updated during the exile, a new version of that history, 1-2 Chronicles, was prepared during the Persian Period (ca. 350 BCE). It clearly reflects the concerns of the postexilic community, focussing almost exclusively on the history of Judah and giving particular emphasis to the institutions of the Temple. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah interpret events from the decree of Cyrus in 538 until the late fifth century.

In addition to the prophetic books composed at this time (Isa 56-66, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and perhaps Joel), there is evidence that the texts from older prophets were also edited and reinterpreted. Psalmody – the singing of psalms or similar sacred canticles in public worship – had first been an important element of worship at

the First Temple, but appears to have taken on an even more significant role in the Second Temple. Although the expansion and revision of the book of Psalms may have continued well into the Hellenistic (323-37 BCE) or even Roman Period (37 BCE-324 CE), an important shaping of the psalter, perhaps including its division into five ‘books’, was part of Persian Period activity. Wisdom writing too flourished during this time. The book of Job, parts of the book of Proverbs, and perhaps Ecclesiastes were probably composed then.

This brief and necessarily broad identification of these aspects of ancient political and religious context to the development of monotheism has worked to set out some of the tensions in play during the time of ancient Israel and Judah (and later Yehud); a part of what a number of scholars identify as the crisis in Israelite history.³² In particular, the socio-political institution of religion would have been under duress from the advancing political pressures of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, but importantly may have used this to advantage when ‘returning’ from exile in shaping and maintaining a monotheistic trajectory.³³ What is presented across the prophetic literature is that the exile and return from exile played a formative role in the recasting of the Yahwistic religion, periods also given great stress in the bible as history movements discussed in the previous chapter. Under this interpretation, while the exile may certainly have invoked a crisis in religion and religious identity,³⁴ the generations returning to the land from Babylon identified and used this crisis as an opportunity to reflect, rewrite and recast the theo-political agenda of the returning elites. Forged in a context of profound political and religious uncertainty, the changing ‘identity’ of the God of Judaism as a deity without borders or limits is framed as meaning for the buffeted Jews a transcendent foundation that could endure the confusion and relentless cultural assault of colonialism, even after the emperor Cyrus defeated the Babylonians and ‘allowed’ both the return of the Jews to Israel and the rebuilding of the temple in

³² As per Ahlström (1982); Berquist (1995); Becking and Korpel (eds. 1999); Porter (ed. 2000); Albertz and Becking (eds. 2003).

³³ The experience of exile in a foreign country plays a part in the development of monotheism. It is the experience of the historical turn of events and of the ‘reading’ of these events as a conferred salvation, liberation/redemption. The acknowledgement of the one God makes the distinction between imperial god (or goddess), city god (or goddess), and house god (or goddess) impossible. A religious segmentation is thus excluded. In Israel’s surrounding world, each political unit is represented by its own deity; but now these units are no longer separate spheres of influence. The centering of Yahweh brings about a change in the belief in God. Yahweh is no longer the ‘imperial God’ of the kingdom of David, nor is he the ‘imperial God’ of the Persian Empire. After the exile, and with the rise and fall of empires he remains the same God. His ‘empire’ is the whole world; that is his kingdom.

³⁴ The crisis referred to here is in regards to the ruination of the temple in Jerusalem that functioned as the central sanctuary for the Yahwistic religion, and the collapse of the Davidic dynasty that functioned as a symbol of divine presence and protection. See Walter Brueggemann’s (1997, 650-79) *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*.

Jerusalem.³⁵ This rewriting of Yahwistic religion will be addressed later on in this chapter. In the meantime, it is worth tracing in more detail the Hebrew Bible's presentation of the establishment of monotheism, particularly in the light of the already broadly established socio-political climate detailed above and the multiple historical interpretations reviewed in the previous chapter.

The Forging of Monotheism

As demonstrated in Chapter Two's mapping of the field of biblical scholarship's traditional engagement with monotheism, the emergence of monotheism in ancient Israel has been shown to be a highly contentious topic. Numerous theories shaped by a variety of scholarly, cultural, and religious investments continue to try to explain monotheism's origins, many of them only thinly disguising eagerness that Israel be the first locus of revelation for the one-ness of divinity. For some scholars of the nineteenth century in particular, the concern has to do with shoring up the position of Western culture through a progressive model of monotheistic development toward modern scientific theories of a unified cosmos.³⁶ For others, the concern is more pietistic, centred on belief that the revelation of divine one-ness and unity is a distinguishing mark and so a special revelation of Judaism (or, by extension, Islam or Christianity). For example, in the mid-twentieth century, Albright argued for a 'Mosaic revolution' that rejected a gradual development and located the emergence of Israelite monotheism instead in a particular transforming, exodus 'moment,' giving weight to the idea that Israel's monotheistic claims were both unprecedented and unique in the ancient world.³⁷

³⁵ The idea of a transcendent foundation and its functioning in the creation and maintenance of identity (and indeed, subjectivity) will be addressed directly in Chapters Five and Six with specific reference to the crisis in knowledge.

³⁶ Cosmology is another word for framing. It is simply the way peoples and cultures perceive, conceive and contemplate their universe; the lens through which they see reality, which affects their value systems and attitudinal orientations. It is the search for the meaning of life, and an unconscious but 'natural' tendency to arrive at a unifying base that constitutes a frame of meaning often viewed as *terminus a quo* (origin) and *terminus ad quem* (end). Thus, cosmology, this frame or perspective, is the underlining thought link that holds together a specific value system, philosophy of life, social conduct, morality, folklores, myths, rites, rituals, norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mappings and theologies. I write variously through this dissertation about Jewish, Christian and North African cosmologies and, in doing so, refer to specific framings. That all social relations are positioned and grounded in cosmos is, therefore, incontestable. What becomes remarkable and of direct importance to this dissertation are the ways in which the horizons of human worlds are imagined and engaged.

³⁷ Robert Gnuse (1997, 64) notes that the most well known proponent of the Mosaic revolution viewpoint was Albright. For Gnuse, Albright's text *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (1946), exemplifies a scholarly Christian apologetic for monotheism. As discussed in the previous chapter, Albright openly opposes the evolution model favoured by other scholars such as Wellhausen, not on the grounds that

While the Eurocentric view of monotheistic origins has, for the most part, lost credibility among contemporary biblical scholars, the emergence of a strong One-God doctrine in Israel remains important enough to generate ongoing study and debate. This has meant in some cases that evolutionary arguments (as discussed in Chapter Two) are rendered into less parochial, more nuanced, and culturally relative terms, and that pietistic arguments for Mosaic revolution and revelation are cast more carefully in social scientific terms. It has become increasingly clear, for example, that the influence of neighboring cultures, such as those of Egypt, Assyria, and Persia, must be more seriously taken into account as the evidence of integration and acculturation in the formation of a distinct Israelite identity and world-view accumulates. In general, there is too much evidence of complexity and multiplicity in the divine sphere for most of Israel's history – prior to the long years of siege by Assyria and Babylon that ended in Babylonian captivity in the early sixth century BCE – to support theories of monotheism as the dominant religious view before then. Gnuse points out that:

the new models [of scholarship] describe Israelite religious development as a slower movement toward the distinctive monotheistic ideas found in the Hebrew Bible, and their final precipitation in the literary texts occurred much later than previously assumed. (1997, 62)

The implication is that doctrinal views that emphasise Israelite uniqueness in the larger ancient Near Eastern 'polytheistic' world cannot be accepted at face value. The Israelites were neither the first nor only ones in the region to develop exclusive One-God doctrines. Nevertheless, in the context of prolonged assault by Assyria in the sixth century and by the end of the Babylonian exile in 539 BCE, it is probable that the Israelites had in fact begun to adopt the exclusive One-God idea that is dramatically and poetically declared throughout Second Isaiah.

Thus while many aspects of the development of Jewish monotheism are important for understanding the complex history of Israel and of Judaism both then and now, and vice versa, as the lively state of scholarly debate attests, "it is of importance that those biblical texts that are normally granted some kind of monotheistic world view or else contribute to main changes in Jewish 'theo-logy' are connected with the crisis of the Babylonian exile" (Mach 1999, 25). It is clear, for instance, that before the early seventh century, the religious cultures of Israel and Judah both tolerated the existence of

evolutionary theory betrayed the unscholarly prejudice toward monotheistic supremacy that it often did, but because it diminished the uniqueness of the revelatory claim of monotheism for Israel and therefore for Christianity. Contemporary biblical scholars, for the most part, reject both approaches.

a multitude of local deities sometimes collected under the plural titles of *Elohim* or *Adonai*, or sometimes merely acknowledged as lesser members of the gods ruled by Yahweh.³⁸ It is, however, too reductionist to situate the emergence of exclusive monotheism in Israel solely in the Babylonian exile. The expulsion of lesser gods among the Jews began a century earlier during the reign of King Josiah, usually dated from 640-609 BCE. The Deuteronomic reform that Josiah initiated under the threat and power of the Assyrian empire laid the groundwork for a theology that more tightly linked the kingdoms of Judah and Israel to each other through the sharing of exclusive worship of one deity, and also laid the groundwork for consolidated power as well.³⁹ Later, with Assyria faltering to one side, and Babylonia beginning to rise on another, Josiah pursued theocracy as a way of holding together his own somewhat fragmented people in a kingdom that, he hoped, would manage to stay afloat through the clashes of empire all around. But, of course, the consolidated Israel could not finally fend Babylon off, and, as noted earlier, when Cyrus II of Persia overpowered the Babylonian empire, thousands of Jewish leaders, scholars, land-holders and priests were forced into exile. The sojourn in Babylon lasted long enough to raise up several generations who did not know Israel at all. In exile, the theological challenges to remain Jewish and yet to survive in a new land were immense. It is a testament to the poets, philosophers, and priests that they did so.⁴⁰ It is here, then, that the unifying exclusivity remembered from Josiah's reign and the monolatrous claims of earlier centuries begins to narrow into monotheism.

Before dealing directly with the sharpened One-God ideology that emerged out of exile in the Second Temple period beginning with Second Isaiah, it is important to further examine the larger historical context out of which this monotheism came and which made its emergence possible. While later to form than previously believed, a dogmatic One-God doctrine does appear to have been distinctively established in Israel in the early seventh to sixth centuries, but, as previously noted, it did not emerge *ex nihilo*. The late political context of clashing empires and superpower violence are the forces that most influence the exclusive and dogmatic dimensions of Israel's One-God claims, but it is also important to recognise, as was also noted in Chapter Two, that

³⁸ See, for example, Genesis 1:26, 11:7, 31:19ff and elsewhere.

³⁹ Pakkala (1999, 238) notes that the strict intolerance toward other gods takes place in advance of the articulation of monotheism as a concept.

⁴⁰ Charles Villa-Vincencio (2004) provides an interesting overview of theology and nation building in his *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights*. Villa-Vincencio explores the encounter between theology and constitutional writing, law making and human rights. Whilst locating his discussion in the context of contemporary South African and Eastern European struggles, he harks back to the post-exilic crises faced by the ancient Israelites as constitutive of identity formation.

more ancient hints and variations of One-God worship and thinking did exist in the cultures against which the Jews eventually differentiated themselves. Halpern argues, for example, that Israel probably had a place among a number of “Hebrew successor-states to the Egyptian empire in Asia, all of which crystallised at the close of the Bronze Age along the major trade routes from Mesopotamia to Egypt [and which] appear uniformly to have devoted themselves to the worship of the national god” (1987, 84).

Certainly One-God philosophies did not constitute new thinking to the Egyptians nor, therefore, presumably, to the subject cultures that they ruled along the Nile.⁴¹ Indeed, numerous scholars have made the case against granting an overly exceptional character to biblical monotheism, especially when the whole complexity of religious belief and worship is taken into account. As early as the fourteenth century BCE the Egyptians were experimenting with a dogmatic One-God theology under Akhenaten, while, over a millennium later, in sixth century BCE Babylon (the century of exilic Jewish presence there), Nabonidus focused the imperial cult on his own deity. Likewise in Persia during its colonial rule of Israel, followers of Zoroaster and subjects of Cyrus II claimed Ahura-Mazda to be the sole, cosmic God.⁴² The cross-fertilisation of these theologies is likely, particularly given the intimacy between them in imperial conquest. As Halpern stresses, “Monotheism, in short, as the modern monotheist imagines it, was neither original to nor practiced in the historical Israel of the Bible” (2009, 117). What is more, because of its ancient non-monotheistic complexity, many now argue that Israelite religion and belief cannot be understood apart from pre-Israelite Canaanite worship and practices that involved many deities. Evidence against a sudden conquest of Canaan has mounted in recent decades and so, consequently, has the importance of Canaanite culture for understanding the development of Israelite religion, especially in the connections between El, Baal, and Asherah, and other Canaanite deities who become related in various ways to Yahweh.⁴³

⁴¹ The literature concerning the development of Israelite monotheism in Egypt is extensive. The most notable example is the short-lived anti-polytheistic Aten revolution of King Akhenaten, although Assmann points out that “time and time again the [traditional] Egyptian sources predicate the oneness/singleness/uniqueness of a god. Amun-Re in particular is regarded as a solar deity who develops an all-embracing creative and life-giving efficiency in the form of the sun” (1997, 193).

⁴² The Persian One-God, Ahura-Mazda, is itself a product of a more ancient Aryan concept of a single purifying fire at the heart (and birth) of a unified cosmos (cf. Porter 2000).

⁴³ “In sum, the Israelites may have perceived themselves as a people different from the Canaanites. Separate religious traditions of Yahweh, separate traditions of origins in Egypt for at least some component of Israel, and separate geographical holdings in the hill country contributed to the Israelites’ sense of difference from their Canaanite neighbours inhabiting the coast and valleys. Nonetheless, Israelite and Canaanite cultures shared a good deal in common, and religion was no exception. Deities and their cults in Iron Age Israel represented aspects of the cultural continuity with the indigenous Late Bronze Age culture and the contemporary urban culture on the coast and in the valleys. The examples of

“[M]onothism”, as Mark S. Smith puts it, “was hardly a feature of Israel’s earliest history” (1990, 154), and it is clear that the process of its eventual development was not entirely unique to Israel either. Martin West notes that “monotheism may seem a stark antithesis to polytheism, but there was no abrupt leap from the one to the other” (1999, 24). Indeed, the biblical texts are filled with references not only to the existence of other gods and to Israelite tolerance of them, but also to indications that faithfulness to the God of Abraham did not require the denial of the existence of others’ gods. Rachel’s theft and protection of her father Laban’s household gods *en route* to the mythic establishment of Israel (Gen 31:19) is one example of this, as are scattered references to the Queen of Heaven (Jer 7:18, 44:15-18). Psalm 82 depicts Yahweh judging the various gods in their assembly, and Psalm 29 calls upon the gods to praise Yahweh.⁴⁴ What is more, “according to Deuteronomy 32 and much other biblical thought, each people had been allotted its own god as Israel had been allotted YHWH (Deut 32: 8-9; cf. Micah 4:5)” (Halpern 1987, 78). Even the first of the Ten Commandments listed in Exodus 20:2 and Deuteronomy 5:7 is ambiguous in this respect, instructing the Israelites to have no other gods *before* Yahweh but not necessarily informing them that no other gods in fact exist:

What has struck the biblical scholars about the pre-Deuteronomistic literature was the fact that there was no real polemic against the existence of other gods ... Even one of the major passages in Deuteronomy itself (4:19–20) seems to imply that the heavenly bodies are a legitimate object of worship for the non-Israelite, though the same chapter provides the denial of other gods (vv. 35–9). (Mach 1999, 23ⁿ11)

Monotheism as the notion that the God of Israel alone is *real*, that no other deity or divine reality even exists, was thus not a part of Israelite thinking until quite late, and then only in relation to rather desperate circumstances of exilic differentiation. The concept of One-God rather than a high god, and practices supporting it, had to be developed, to find a footing and become legitimate, at least among the religious leaders of Israel. For the millennium or so before that happened, even the name of the Israelites’ deity remained unsettled, indicating a gradual convergence of multiple gods and their

El, Baal, and the symbol of the Asherah illustrate this continuity for the period of the Judges” (M. S. Smith 1990, 7).

⁴⁴ West points out that “according to normal Semitic idiom, ‘sons of gods’ means ‘members of the class of “god”, not individually distinguished’, just as ‘sons of craftsmen’ means ‘craftsmen’. In the 29th Psalm these lesser deities are actually addressed directly: Render to Yahweh, O sons of gods, render to Yahweh glory and strength; render to Yahweh the glory of his name, worship Yahweh in the splendour of holiness” (1999, 27).

names as the social, political, and cultural entity of Israel emerged out of a multiplicity of peoples, experiences, stories, and gods. In fact Yahweh, a German-to-English adaptation of the unpronounceable Hebrew consonants JHWH, or more properly in Hebrew יהוה, is, according to Thompson:

a very specific deity, probably originating in the Shasu regions of Seir or Edom. Certainly Judah of the 8-6th centuries and Samaria of the 9-7th centuries maintained Yahweh among their dominant deities, along with El, Baal, Anat, Asherah and others. However, there were many Yahwehs ... That some in Judah saw his consort as Asherah is hardly any longer debatable, but that he was sole god of Jerusalem or of the state of Judah seems unlikely. One should no more identify the many Yahwehs than the various Baals (with whom Yahweh is identified) or Els (of which the biblical tradition is replete). (1996, 119n13)⁴⁵

Because, as Mark S. Smith points out, “Yahweh’s qualities were often expressed in terms largely shaped by the characteristics of other deities belonging to ancient Israel’s heritage that Israel rejected in the course of time” (1990, 166), the condensation of these divinities into a single, universal deity served some purpose in the formation of Israel’s identity. While piety may require some to assert that a strict monotheism was part of God’s communication from the very start (the problem lying in typically faulty reception on the part of human beings), the idea of one deity alone was not clearly articulated until quite late in the story, making the socio-political dimension of monotheism important to delineate.

The Socio-politics of Monotheism

If Israel’s eventual development of a strong, even intolerant monotheism by the time Second Isaiah was written (ca. 540-520 BCE) is taken as given, what is interesting is that it developed so strongly then, with clear polemics against other gods and against multiplicities of gods. Indeed Israelite identity, in this period, became associated ineradicably with One-God worship practices. Fidelity and infidelity also became a standard value and currency in Israelite identity, a valuation that continues to

⁴⁵ What is more, Halpern writes, “early Israel was somehow not quite monotheistic, despite its concentration on YHWH as the special deity of the people and the supreme causal force in the cosmos. On the other hand, Israel’s neighbours were not fully polytheistic, for their cults centered around particular higher gods” (1987, 80).

reverberate two and a half millennia later. The ongoing contributions of scholars including Mark S. Smith, Mach, Halpern, Assmann, and others demonstrate that the emergence of strong monotheism in Israel is both complex and multifaceted. The significance of Israel's socio-political crises in the formation of what Pakkala (1999) calls 'intolerant monolatry' also cannot be underestimated in the challenge of thinking responsibly about monotheism's entailments in theology today. According to this interpretation, the millennium stretching back from the Romans' final destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE – arguably one of almost unceasing threat to Jewish identity: the beginning of the monarchy around 1000 BCE, its almost immediate division into dual kingdoms in 926 BCE, and then an 800-year state of siege and colonial domination by a succession of superpowers – cannot be insignificant with regard to monotheism when understood as theo-political imagination.

It is, after all, in the middle of that millennium during a time when, as Mark S. Smith suggests, "nothing seemed possibly good for the Judean elite held in captivity in Babylon" that the poetry of Second Isaiah brilliantly turns the rhetoric of political defeat into cosmic victory (2001, 179). The imagery and language of the defeated kingdom is not lost but rather converted into the language of victorious divinity. The ruler of Israel is clearly no longer a human king, and no longer a parochial deity, tied to one land or one people. No, Smith suggests, the genius of this period is the transformation of the political downfall of Israel into the political ascendancy of Israel's God: the warrior-king and creator are melded and, in so doing, "'Second Isaiah' addresses the issue of loss of land and king. Yahweh is [now] not just the god of Israel (both as land and people) but of all lands and nations" (ibid.). This is framed explicitly in the literature of Second Isaiah:

For thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts; I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me ... (Isa 44:6-8)

For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!); I am the Lord, and there is no other ... (Isa 45:18)

He says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isa 49:6)

The hitherto local god of a small, defeated people declares himself ruler of the universe, having used the Babylonian Cyrus as his tool, having included the exile of the Israelites in his plan, making all of the suffering and struggle no longer reflect defeat but victory. And, most of all, the voice of God in Second Isaiah confounds all other powers and divinities by declaring them not subordinate but non-existent. This is no longer monolatry, the worship of one god only (without having to deny the existence of others elsewhere), but an exclusive monotheism, a theo-political claim of One-God alone, unique and triumphant.⁴⁶

Mark S. Smith's theory that Israel's eventual One-God doctrine is the result of a process of convergence and differentiation is persuasive. The complicated yet largely incomplete historical evidence best supports the theory that diverse peoples and their deities came together over a long period of time and in the process of merging their increasingly shared ancestral stories also differentiated themselves as a people from others. The world is not without many examples of this kind of phenomenon where communal identity among different groups is slowly forged over time with the mingling of stories, ancestors and divinities. Convergence yields a new identity, one that becomes distinct on its own and so requires a process of differentiation from others. This latter aspect even entails an aggression or defensiveness of identity and practices in the face of other, more established identities. Convergence and differentiation, of course, are never fully complete as the biblical texts demonstrate over and over.⁴⁷ This theory is persuasive in relation to Israel's religious development largely because it accommodates so much of the ambiguity and remnants that pervade the historical and literary record. It finds in the very inconsistencies of that record a persistence of pre-exilic multiplicity and complexity – of both humans and divinity – that, while repressed in post-exilic doctrines of monotheism, still exert influence over time.

It is important to remember that the 'monotheism' that is forged out of the millennia of Israelite convergences and differentiations is not itself monolithic or always consistent. Indeed, the varying circumstances of Jews after the exile and throughout the Second Temple period (from ca. 520 BCE to 70 CE) meant that monotheism played different roles in the religious and political rhetoric of the still-

⁴⁶ This is not just a philosophical claim or merely a shift in preference. It is important to always recall that conceptual shifts such as these exert pressure well beyond the personal and preferential. Hence my use of 'theo-political'.

⁴⁷ Timothy Beal's (1997) *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther* is one such example of biblical 'incompleteness'. Beal draws on a variety of perspectives (religion, sexism, nationalism, annihilation) in order to raise new questions and reconsider old assumptions about the book of Esther. Such incompleteness and its supplementing is also a driver of my discussions throughout this dissertation.

colonised people. Mach (1999) identifies three distinct types of exclusive monotheism that influenced this later period, all of which reflect political anxiety in the face of continued and changing external threats to Jewish identity. The first type of exclusive monotheism is contained in the polemic against other peoples, nations, and cultures found throughout the Babylonian exile period. With the physical centre of worship gone, the political and religious leaders in captivity far away, and the conquering powers ever present, such polemic makes sense as part of an attempt to keep the exiles – and perhaps particularly their children – from giving up and taking on the identity of their captors. The struggle is perhaps not all that different from that of people today in cultural environments who seek to resist the forces of global capitalism that draw so many of their children away.

A second form of exclusive monotheism that became important in the post-exilic period in particular, Mach (1999) argues, was one that actually sought connection with the colonising culture. In many ways, the Persians may have been more strategic in their colonial practices than the Babylonians whom they defeated. Their victory over Babylon resulted in a kind of freedom for the captive Judeans, many of whom eventually returned to Jerusalem to begin, with Persian colonial help, to rebuild the Temple. The Persians were, in other words, more ‘tolerant’ than the Babylonians, communicating some degree of respect for the indigenous religion and practices of the Jewish people. This made polemics against them less effective. The beginnings of Hellenistic culture in Greece also certainly began to enter into Jewish intellectual life during this time, and some speculate as well that Persian Zoroastrianism, a non-Hebraic form of One-God belief, was attractive to upper class Jews. Mach suggests that in this context a new form of exclusive monotheism emerged which added philosophical depth to Jewish notions of Yahweh’s sole dominance. It came out of an identification some Jewish religious leaders began to have with the elite of Hellenistic culture (ibid. 22ff). Where we might think of the first form of monotheism as a kind of exclusivism based on ethnic or national distinctions between gods (Yahweh against all others), this second form excludes on the basis of social class (the universal properties of Yahweh’s divine nature, which he shares with the Persian One-God Ahura-Mazda, sets the One-God of Israel apart from more parochial and less philosophically ‘advanced’ conceptions). In this form, “those who do not belong to that cultural stratum will be defined as ‘others’, and their worship will be open to mockery” (ibid. 25). Again, a contemporary analogy might be those individuals from threatened traditional cultures who pursue advanced study in the universities of Europe and the United States and find among the intellectual

elites of those cultures a conceptual affinity with their own such that they begin to see themselves as members of a transnational elite who do not need to return home or who may no longer feel at home except among fellow graduates.

Thirdly, Mach suggests, “Jewish ‘monotheism’ had to realise that the Jewish nation in itself is split, yet, still opposes ‘others’” (ibid. 25). The nation of Israel, divided in itself between those in exile and those left behind, between north and south, and between diasporic communities, had to develop a means of accommodation to the divisions, or possibly die through amputation. Exile had forced a profound question of divine nature on the Jews. The idea of a universal god, able to transcend national boundaries, was difficult to understand. For example, the eighth-century Aramaean commander Naaman carried bags of Israelite soil on two mules with him back to Damascus so that he might worship Yahweh even there (2 Kgs 5:15 ff).⁴⁸ A universal concept of God that he could affirm intellectually was inaccessible to him on a practical level (or inaccessible to those he commanded). The deity attached to land still made more sense pragmatically, and so the land had to travel with the commander if he and his soldiers were to continue to practice their faith, to be ‘heard’ by their God.

A monotheism that transcends time and space but that binds a people as Chosen irrespective of time and space took time to catch on but eventually made possible the retention of what would become a distinctively Jewish identity in the face of relentless socio-political turmoil. The people had to learn that the God of Israel no longer bound them through the presence of ark or temple or even land, but through act and obedience. A universal deity, they discovered, could transcend divisions and even splits in the nation and still be God. Even more important, however, in being One and Only, that deity can continue to bind the nation and keep its identity intact despite its military or political devastation. It is both the universality, and the disavowal of all other gods (the exclusivity) of Yahweh’s emergent one-ness that made this transcendent identity possible for Israel. The transcendence of the One-God freed the people’s identity from the limitations of geographic space or from narrow and fragile national boundaries, boundaries that had been overwhelmed by the exile and continued to be threatened by superpower empires on every side.

For sixth-century Jews, then, caught between the crumbling Babylonian empire, the Persian empire, and the volatile Greeks soon to coalesce under Alexander, the possibility of a transcendent deity that could rule over even a scattered and exiled nation became attractive and meaningful, as the vicissitudes and traumas of imperial violence

⁴⁸ Also see Lang’s (1983, 22) discussion.

forced a choice between the tradition of a god of the land whose might had once overcome the Pharaoh's armies (but now seemed unable to smite the Babylonians) and a universal god of the displaced, whose might made use of those armies for purposes far removed from land and temple. Faith in the universal One-God required a different practice of worship, which gradually became tied more to acts (of fidelity and obedience, for example) than to genealogy or temple, although memory of the god of the land never disappeared. In this enormous conceptual and practical shift on the part of the Jewish people, Yahweh too made the political shift from genealogical patriarch to national warrior king to universal emperor. These were shifts that carried fundamental implications for the political, social, and religious identity of the people.

Prior to the Babylonian exile, the political gamble of nationhood and monarchy required of the Israelites a capacity to interpret themselves to themselves and to the world as a unified and strong entity protected by a unified and strong divinity. Subsequent experience of foreign assaults, warfare, and finally of Babylonian exile, gave energy to the Yahweh-alone movement, which also caused the Israelite identity to sharpen into focus. All of these experiences and more led up to the poetry and polemics of Second Isaiah, in which it is possible to glimpse the distinctive monotheism of Israel being hammered out. Monarchy, siege and exile – especially instigated by neighbouring superpowers – coupled with the challenges of always-uncertain national identity seem to have enough to do with monotheism's formation in early Israel that the resulting One-God doctrine carries with it through the millennia a residual and persistent anxiety regarding political rule. The Durkheimian theory that communal or national identity is always borne by the gods fits here (cf. Durkheim 1965, 322 ff). They serve as emblems of that identity in their military protective roles and in their capacity as keepers (and authors) of the people's stories of origin.

The traumatic dimensions of Israel's emergence as a nation are reflected in the deeply defensive aspects of its developing monotheism. "We may deduce," Mach suggests, "that the sharp polemic against foreign gods has its roots in a social-historical situation where Israel is not really sure of its own religious-political identity" (1999, 25). Certainly the One-God that emerged out of the political disaster of exile is the warrior king and cosmic creator all in one. And although Israel and Judah's combined contribution to the contemporary monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is complex and ever-changing, in much of Judeo-Christian theologies at least, it is the imaginative strength, the poetry, and the mythic power exemplified in these sometimes beautiful and desperate sixth-century writings from 'the banks of Babylon' that resonate

through the centuries, and that have entrained – that is, incorporated and swept up in its flow – so much theological thinking about the One-God.

The exclusive or strong monotheism that came to fruition in Israel during the second temple period served to orient Jews more clearly and deliberately both as Jews and as victors in what could otherwise have been a culturally and religiously devastating set of circumstances. The clarity that the writers of post-exilic Isaiah and Jeremiah possessed concerning the universal dominion and cosmic supremacy of their One-God was, as many biblical scholars have argued, and as I have outlined in this and the previous chapter, the result of a long and gradual development out of a complex socio-religious past. Jewish religious leaders in exile, who were struggling to maintain their powerful understanding of God's care for and connection to the Jews against multigenerational evidence of social, political, and cultural loss and confusion, realised that the unity and supremacy of God made Israel's political defeat irrelevant at worst or instructive at best. "Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket," the exilic Isaiah poet writes, "and are accounted as dust on the scales; see, he takes up the isles like fine dust" (Isa 40:15). This imaginative theological turn frees God from the constraints of place – whether in ark, temple, mountain, or land – to be as ubiquitous as life itself and as mobile as a Torah scroll, and proclaims this God – and not just any other – founder and governor of every place, even Babylon – or Persia. This theological move, or realisation, set Israel's theocracy up to become Judaism.

In conclusion to this section – tracing the socio-politics of monotheism – the links that scholars such as Mark S. Smith, Halpern, and others have made between the exile in Babylon and the clarification of divine singularity, unity, and universal transcendence in the case of Israel, suggest strongly that the theological imagination is always responding to the question of divine presence, interest, and legitimacy in social and political affairs. What can a priestly theologian do when virtually all of the popular beliefs (and even traditional wisdom) about what God ought to be and do seem contradicted by present conditions? For the Israelites in exile, the apparent defeat of the ethno-political deity through the defeat of the *ethnos* and *polis* probably meant one of three things: either their God was dead, or he was not powerful enough to keep his promises, or the people had misunderstood his true nature to begin with. The Jewish teachers in exile and under colonial rule adopted the third option, arguing for a "new song" (Isa 42:10). They reaffirmed the shaken, apparently defeated *ethnos* and *polis* by claiming it to be other than that which lay in ruins. Transcendent of the local in every

way, their God did not reside in human-made dwellings, and so could not be defeated by foreign armies or the destruction of a temple.

Created in a context of profound political and religious uncertainty, this identity of the God of Judaism as a deity without borders or limits meant for the buffeted Jews a foundation that could endure the confusion and relentless cultural assault of colonialism, even after the emperor Cyrus defeated the Babylonians and allowed both the return of the Jews to Israel and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish concept of One-God, built on more ancient and familiar assertions of Yahweh's superiority and strength as warrior-king, apparently merged with divine creation traditions to yield the absolute, cosmic transcendence of God that *negated* all other divine realities.⁴⁹

While more than half a millennium of war, exile, and colonisation is clearly not the whole story of monotheism's emergence in Israel, its importance is unmistakable in setting the conditions that made exclusive monotheism both intelligible and persuasive, particularly when what was at stake was cultural survival. When the apparent choice in the face of overwhelming odds is death or change, hindsight suggests that change is the choice to make. When a local deity seemingly cannot 'survive' the conditions that war and cultural assault impose, that choice also is usually the same. What is remarkable is that most deities 'die' because they cannot change (or be changed). In the case of Israel, the very human, expedient need was for the familiar and local warrior-king-patriarch protector and progenitor to merge into and with the more cosmic, abstract, and unfamiliar (and un-nameable) source of all things, a single God now not only of the Israelites but of all the distant and unfamiliar peoples. It is this move (or recognition), grounded in cultural trauma, which reverberates through Judeo-Christian monotheism and continues shaping its concepts of the divine.

This chapter has thus far been concerned, firstly, to delineate the major socio-political upheavals – such as the destruction of the Temple, incursions by neighbouring empires, exile, return, and vassalage – that have been presented as a) contributing to the creation and maintenance of particular divine identities, as well as b) assisting later configurations of Israel to further refine an ethnic distinctiveness. These claims around

⁴⁹ As has been noted, this notion was also familiar to the other ancient Near Eastern contexts that probably contributed to the development of post-exilic Jewish monotheism. Not least of these were the Persians, the very people who had 'liberated' the Jews from Babylon into a less repressive rule. In addition, at only a slightly greater distance, the busy Nile corridor ferried a wide range of African cosmologies northward, many of which supported unified ultimate divine principles that would have also added to the general legitimacy of the notion of a single divine canopy under which *all* of the strange and alien peoples belonged (see, e.g., Forde ed. 1999).

identity will be directly addressed later in the dissertation. Secondly, and for now, it suffices to conclude that these socio-political events, and the shaping of divine identity that took place in response to them, may be said to cause a problem for the claim of one-ness of monotheism as traditionally explicated. That is to say, although the Hebrew Bible is usually and erroneously regarded as a monotheistic collection, monotheism represents only a thin layer. Containing multiple, partly contradictory conceptions of the divine, some passages as already discussed deny the existence of other gods, whereas others take their existence for granted. Different authors and editors have also imparted their views to the Hebrew Bible so that the final text does not contain a consistent view. It is to some of these problems for the one-ness of monotheism that I now turn.

Problems for the One-ness of Monotheism

In truth, biblical scholars should have seen Asherah's presence all along, since it is transparent in the several passages in the Hebrew Bible where the word *'āshērāh* must be read as a proper name ... and the name of whom, if not the well-known old Canaanite deity Asherah? (Dever 2005, 211)

As should be evident at this stage, claims presenting One-God theology or declarations of God's incomparability are problematic for a number of reasons. Although the final form of the text in most biblical books bears the stamp of those who were apparently monotheistic, it is also clear that the references to the God of Israel do not just contain the name Yahweh. Many other names and titles also occur, although they are often rendered in various Bible translations as epithets or descriptions rather than as names. For example, and as prefaced in the preceding chapter, the word *El* is used of the Israelite God but can also mean just 'god' in a generic sense. This is in line with much Northwest Semitic usage in which *el* (or the earlier form *ilu*) could stand for both the head of the pantheon (the god El) and for the word 'god, divinity' in general. The name *El Shaddai* (אל שדי) or just *Shaddai* alone, is also used in a number of passages in Genesis (17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 49:25). This is also the divine name found through much of the poem of Job and seems to designate the prime divinity for the original composer of the book's core (the name Yahweh occurs in Job only in the framework). In addition,

Genesis 14:18 attests to the deity ‘God Most High’ or ‘God on High’ (אל יון, *Ēl ‘Elyōn*), a designation not known anywhere else.⁵⁰

Other biblical texts also suggest a time when Yahweh was not only a deity alongside other deities, but perhaps even a subordinate of *El*.⁵¹ Scholars, for instance, had long wondered whether the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 32:8 was not due to later editing because of the Septuagint text,⁵² which seemed to presuppose a different Hebrew original where the god ‘*Elyōn* “established the boundaries of the nations according to the number of angels of God”. The suggestion of another, more ‘original’, Hebrew manuscript seems now to have been confirmed by a Hebrew manuscript from Qumran (4QDeut^j = 4Q37) which reads “[according to the number of] the sons of God” (אלהים בני, *bny ‘lhyim*). The passage goes on to say that Jacob is Yahweh’s portion (32:9). Reconstruction of data suggests that the passage originally read something along the lines of:

When the Most High [*Elyon*] appointed the nations,
when he divided humankind,
he fixed the boundaries of the peoples
according to the number of the gods;
the LORD’S [*Yhwh*’s] own portion was his people,
Jacob his allotted share.⁵³

Most High, or Elyon, is the title of El, the senior god who sat at the head of the divine council in the Ugaritic literature of ancient Canaan. The biblical text here applies El’s title to Israel’s God (Gen 14:18-22; Num 24:16; Ps 46:4; 47:2; 78:35). The reference to the gods is to the lesser gods – the sons of El – who make up the divine council (Ps 82:1; 89:6-7), to each of whom Elyon here assigns a foreign nation. This suggests that

⁵⁰ Some scholars doubt the accuracy of the text here, though the name ‘*Elyōn* (אל יון) by itself occurs in Num 24:16, Deut 32:8 and Isa 14:14, while the Ugaritic equivalent (*ly*) is applied to Baal (CTU 1.16.3.6, 8). CTU is the abbreviation for Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz and Joaquín Sanmartín’s (eds. 1995) *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places* (CTU: Second Enlarged Edition).

⁵¹ The gods Resheph and Deber appear in Hab 3:5 as part of the military retinue of Yahweh. Other deities who gain some mention in the Hebrew Bible include the ‘hosts of heaven’ criticised in 2 Kgs 21:5, but mentioned without such criticism in 1 Kgs 22:19 and Zeph 1:5. For an exhaustive list see *Dictionary of Deities and Demons* (van Toorn, Becking and van der Horst 1999).

⁵² The Septuagint (LXX) is the earliest version of the Hebrew Bible which is extant, or of which we may claim to possess a certain knowledge. According to tradition, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and apocryphal books of the same linguistic origin, was completed by seventy (some say seventy-two) Jewish scholars at Alexandria between 284-247 BCE.

⁵³ The Masoretic Text (MT) reads אלהים בני ישראל, transliterated as *lemispar bene yisrael* (‘sons of Israel’), as opposed to the ‘divine beings’ (αγγελοι θεου) or ‘angels of god’ found in the Septuagint (LXX) and the 4QDeut 32.8 (DSS) *lemispar bene el* (sons of El). See John Day’s (2000, 20-24) *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*.

Yahweh (as one of these sons of El) inherited Israel as his particular portion. Such a situation in which Yahweh is merely one among the sons of El in the divine assembly is also found in Psalm 89:7-8, which may be read as:

For who in heaven compares to Yhwh?
Who is like Yhwh among the sons of the Elim (gods)?
El creates awe in the council of the Holy Ones.
He is great and strikes fear in all about him.

Here, again, Yahweh is a son of El, among other sons, even if he is said to be incomparable to the fellow sons of El. Similarly, Psalm 82:1 speaks of God judging among the gods (see Trotter 2012).

In addition, the concept of the divine assembly or divine council is one that was widespread among Semitic pantheons. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of Yahweh himself having a divine council is found in 1 Kings 22:19-22 in which he presides over the “host of heaven” (צבא השמי', *sēbā' haššāmayim*). In later times this divine council was interpreted as consisting of angels who surrounded Yahweh, despite the point that angels have only a minor place in Israelite tradition until the post-exilic period.⁵⁴ Studies of the Northwest Semitic pantheons have shown that the gods had various ranks, the lowest being the messenger gods and that they spoke for the gods sending them (Handy 1994). Similarly, angels in the Hebrew Bible speak for Yahweh. For example, Exodus 3:2-5 mentions that “the *mal'ak Yhwh*” appeared to Moses, but then the rest of the passage goes on to say that “Yhwh said”. Thus, the ‘messenger gods’ (מלאכי', *Mal'akim*) of the original Northwest Semitic pantheon (and perhaps other divinities as well) became reduced to angels in later Judaism, suggesting that the outlines of the original polytheistic divine council are still retained despite the monotheistic views of the final editors of the biblical texts.⁵⁵ As I delineated earlier, the clearest agenda for monotheism is in Second Isaiah with his denial of the existence of other gods: Yahweh alone is without beginning or end, uniquely divine and God alone the creator of the cosmos and there is nothing like him (Isa 46:9, 48:12-13).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ The Hebrew word for ‘angel’ (מלאך) is transliterated as *mal'ak*, meaning ‘messenger’ and may be used of human messengers as well as heavenly ones.

⁵⁵ For a proposed historical reconstruction of the relation between the prophets and the religious practices of Judah and Israel, see Bernhard Lang (1983, 13-56) “The Yahweh-Alone Movement and the Making of the Jewish Monotheism”.

⁵⁶ The book of Deuteronomy has some statements that express similar ideas, (eg., Deut 4:35, 39), but these exist alongside other textual remnants that seem to accept the existence of other gods (Deut 5:7; 6:4 [cf. M. S. Smith 2001, 153]). An editing process in which the monotheistic statements were later additions to the text could explain this, with many scholars seeing the development of monotheism during

This uniqueness is also present in earlier declaration of the One-ness of God: “what god in heaven or on earth can perform deeds and mighty acts like yours!” (Deut 3:24). This is that part of the narrative wherein Moses has witnessed, from the Exodus up to the present moment, Yahweh’s incomparability even among the beings known as ‘gods’ (*’elim* or *’elohim*). Similar declarations that none among the gods is comparable to Yahweh occur frequently in the Hebrew Bible, often as rhetorical questions. Best known is Exodus 15:11 “Who is like you Yahweh, among the gods! [*’elim*]”.⁵⁷ Declarations of one-ness, however, seem to exceed monotheistic claims to one-ness. It is clear from passages like Psalm 89:7 that the ‘gods’ referred to are the celestial or supernatural beings that surround Yahweh in the manner of a royal court – that is, the ‘host of heaven’ including the sun, moon, and stars, spirits, winds, fiery flames, seraphs, angels and the chief of God’s heavenly army; several of these also carry out missions for God on earth.⁵⁸ Biblical Hebrew, like other Semitic languages, used words meaning “god” (*’el/’elim* and *’elohim*) in several senses: God, angels, ghosts, and even idols and foreign gods. It is unclear whether the text, by using *’elohim*, is referring to title or noun given that the term so easily slips between being used as a common noun meaning ‘god’ and as the preferred designation for the god of Israel in certain portions of the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁹

Problems for claims of one-ness for monotheism continue to proliferate as Yahweh is equated with El (אל) and with other divine names. Since Asherah (אשרה)⁶⁰ is most often a consort of El in Northwest Semitic texts and her name often appears along with that of Yahweh, a number of scholars have suggested recently that this equation is not fortuitous but represents the actual origin of Yahweh. That is, that the latter developed in the context of El worship. In any case, it would not be surprising for

the seventh to sixth centuries BCE. For example, it has been pointed out that astral imagery of the late eighth and seventh centuries had disappeared from seals and seal impressions of the Jerusalem elite by the early sixth, and also the blessing and salvation functions of Yahweh’s ‘Asherah’, known from several inscriptions, had been absorbed by Yahweh by the time of the Lachish and Arad ostraca (Uehlinger 1997). This has been interpreted as indirect evidence of Josiah’s reform and a move in the direction of exclusive monotheism.

⁵⁷ In Ex 15:11 and several other passages, some translations such as the NJPS render ‘god(s)’ and ‘sons of god(s)’ as ‘celestials’ and ‘divine beings’.

⁵⁸ See 1 Kgs 22:19-21 (cf. Deut 4:19); and discussion on Psalm 89:7 in Handy (1994, 120n127; cf. Handy 1996, 31n9; Niehr 1996, 62n70; B. Schmidt 1996, 87n21; Trotter 2001b, 128; Wyatt 2011, 73).

⁵⁹ Most notably, found in Pentateuchal E and P and the ‘Elohistic Psalter’ (Ps 42-83). For a discussion on *’elohim*, see Joel Burnett (2001) *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim*.

⁶⁰ For a survey of scholarship on Asherah see Tilde Binger’s (1997) *Asherah: Goddess in Ugarit, Israel and the Old Testament*; Saul M. Olyan’s (1988) *Asherah in the Cult of Yahweh in Israel*; Judith Hadley’s (2000) *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess*; Bob Becking et al’s (2001) edited collection *Only One God? Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah*.

El and Yahweh to be assimilated over time if they were once separate deities.⁶¹ Various other male deities are also equated with Yahweh – except for Baal who is depicted as being in a life-or-death struggle with Yahweh. As discussed previously, such processes of assimilation, or ‘convergence’ following Mark S. Smith (1990; 2001), mark long and complex movements from polytheism toward monotheism.⁶² Following on from the struggle between Baal and Yahweh, a number of other passages also detail a mythical picture of Yahweh not found in most biblical texts (Day 1985). They are reminiscent of myths about Baal known from Ugaritic texts and even have overtones of Marduk’s defeat of Tiamat from whose body he created the heavens and the earth in the Babylonian creation epic *Ennuma Elish*. Unlike Genesis 1, however, these Akkadian and Ugaritic passages suggest that God created by defeating various monsters of chaos who appear as supernatural beings.⁶³ Correspondingly, in Isaiah 27:1, Yahweh takes his sword and defeats “Leviathan [לִיָּתָן, *lwytn*] the piercing [בֶּרֶחַ, *brh*] serpent, even Leviathan the slippery [עֲקֻלָּתוֹן, *‘qltn*] serpent, and he will slay the Tannin [תַּנִּינִי, *tnyn*] in the sea”. This may be compared with Ugaritic texts that allege that Baal defeated such monsters. One prominent myth describes Baal’s defeat of the sea god Yamm (*CTU* 2). Another passage alludes to battles of another monster of chaos defeated by Baal:

Did I not destroy Yamm the darling of El,
 Did I not make an end of Nahar the great god?
 Was not the dragon (*tnn*) captured and vanquished?
 I did destroy the wriggling (‘*qltn*) serpent,
 The tyrant with seven heads.

Similarly, *CTU* 1.5.1.1-3 states:

For all that you smote Leviathan the slippery serpent (*ltn.bṭn.brh*)
 And made an end of the wriggling (‘*qltn*) serpent...,
 The tyrant with seven heads?

⁶¹ Herbert Niehr is critical of this assumption that equates El with Yahweh, arguing instead that Bronze Age Ugarit is not a contemporary of Iron Age Syro-Palestine. See Niehr’s (1996) “The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite religion: Methodological and religio-historical aspects”.

⁶² Mark S. Smith’s theory that Israel’s eventual One-God doctrine is the result of convergence and differentiation is persuasive. The complicated historical evidence best supports the theory that diverse peoples and their deities came together over a long period of time and, in the process of merging their increasingly shared ancestral stories, also differentiated themselves as a people from others. Whilst I find Smith’s hypothesis elegant, it is also reductionist in that it repeats the impasse of the quest for origin discussed in the previous chapter.

⁶³ See Bernard Batto’s (1992) *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition*; Timothy K. Beal’s (2002) *Religion and its Monsters*; and Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst’s (1999) *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*.

These Hebrew and Ugaritic texts are similar in themes and share some of the same basic vocabulary. These surviving and palimpsestuously overwritten passages are isolated instances of older beliefs almost erased and reinterpreted by a dominant monotheistic view of Yahweh that controlled the final shaping of biblical texts. A few verses escaped editing, however, confirming what can be safely reconstructed from inscriptions: that Yahweh was originally conceived as one god among many, perhaps subordinate to and a son of El (Handy 1994; 1996; Geller 2000; M. S. Smith 2001; 2002). He created by fighting and defeating various monsters of chaos such as Leviathan, Tannin and Rahab, much as Baal did in the Ugaritic texts. When monotheism became the dominant view, these older views were simply expunged or, in some cases, reinterpreted so as not to be an embarrassment to monotheistic views.

Biblical names also suggest a plethora of deities. There are many names with the theophoric element of El (Israel, Elijah, Elisha, Samuel and so on); more significant are Shaddai names (e.g., Num 1:5-6: Shedeur, Zurishaddai; Num 1:12; Ammishaddai), but perhaps the most interesting are the names with Baal elements in them. Considering the biblical polemic against Baal, one might have expected not to see such names but they are found in surprising contexts. One of Saul's sons has a name compounded with Baal: Eshba'al ('man of Baal' or 'Man of the Land') and Jonathon's son was Merib-ba'al ('he that resists Baal'). These names are often overlooked because the Samuel texts substitute surrogate names compounded with the word 'shame' (Ish-bosheth for 'man of shame' (2 Sam 2:8); similarly Mephibosheth for Merib-ba'al (2 Sam 21:7)), but they are 'correctly' preserved in 1 Chronicles (8:33-34; 9:39-40).

This should not be surprising given that biblical texts provide numerous accounts of Israel 'falling away' from the 'true' worship of the one God into paganism, idolatry, and worship of other gods. To balance this, one might well point to the opposition to Baal worship in the time of Elijah. However, it is not entirely clear that this is as simple as it looks, for the 'Baal' of Jezebel was most likely a Phoenician god, and thus a foreign cult introduced into Israel. It was symbolic of a foreign queen and would have been opposed by certain traditionalists. That all the Baal worshippers could supposedly fit into the small Baal temple (2 Kgs 10:18-28) further suggests that this was not a widespread alternative to Yahweh worship. Further indication is found in the names of Ahab's family and associates. His chief minister was named Obadiah ('servant of Yhwh', 1 Kgs 18:3) and his two sons had Yahweh names (Ahaziah and Jehoram); and the prophets he consulted were prophets of Yahweh (1 Kgs 22:5-28). Although the

text accuses him of Baal worship (1 Kgs 16:31-32), we see no actual evidence that he promoted Baal worship beyond the royal cult specifically established for his wife. The opposition to Elijah and others was probably political opposition to Jezebel, even if disguised as religious piety. Ahab himself, by all accounts, was a Yahweh worshipper. The ostraca found during the excavation of Samaria give a similarly mixed picture.⁶⁴ A variety of theophorous names are found in the texts known so far; of these eleven are compounded with Yahweh, six with Baal. There is no way to see any social distinction in the names: one has the impression that these were common, ordinary names about which people would not have thought very much except in a cultic context. It would appear from these materials that Baal and Yahweh were worshipped happily side by side.

Recent archaeological finds, touched on in Chapter Two, have been even more revealing. The inscription found in 1975-76 at Kuntillet 'Ajrûd in the Negev – dated to about the eighth century BCE – has been read as “I blessed you by Yahweh of Samaria and by his Asherah” (G. Davies 1991). Similarly, in Khirbet el-Qôm near Hebron, another inscription was found and dated to the seventh century (ibid.). It is very difficult to read partly because it seems to have some of the letters duplicated – an instance of over-writing or palimpsest – and a number of readings have been offered by scholars (see Zevit 2001, 359-70). The original editor Andre Lemaire translates it as: “Blessed be Uriah by Yhwh and <by his Asherah>, from his enemies he has saved him” (Lemaire 1977; 1984b). Epigrapher Joseph Naveh reads it as: “May Uriyahu be blessed by Yahweh my guardian and by his Asherah” (Naveh in Zevit 1984, 39). Ziony Zevit interprets it as: “I blessed Uryahu to YHWH / to wit, from his enemies ... for the sake of Asheratah save him / by Abiyahu” (1984, 39).⁶⁵

These finds have created a great deal of debate because this is the first time that any direct extra-biblical evidence of goddess worship has turned up with such a close approximation to ancient Israel (even the Samaria ostraca had no goddess names). There

⁶⁴ Although evidence is scanty, it is possible that the religion of Israel and especially of the city of Samaria became more heterogeneous in the heyday of the Northern Kingdom. During Omri's dynasty the state became economically prosperous, which meant wide political and cultural contacts with other areas of the Levant. For example, the Book of Kings implies contacts with the Phoenician realm that most likely entailed religious influence. References to Baal in 1 Kgs 16:30-33 may reflect these circumstances. Since 1 Kgs 16:30-33 is heavily edited, one has to be careful with the passage. For details and further literature on the development of Israel's religion during the monarchy, see Pakkala's (1999) *Intolerant Monolatry*. Features of Israel's religion are also described in Mark S. Smith's (2001) *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, and his (2002) *The Early History of God*, as well as Zevit's (2001) *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches*.

⁶⁵ Tilde Binger (1997, 107) points out that in the Kuntillet 'Ajrûd and Khirbet el-Qôm inscriptions Yahweh is connected to specific geographical locations – Teman and Samaria – which are suggestive of a localised deity rather than, for example, a national deity.

are some who question whether ‘Asherah’ is a reference to a cult object or to a goddess (see, e.g., Olyan 1988; Binger 1997; Dever 1999), an interpretation that partly hinges on the grammatical question of whether one can put a pronominal suffix on a proper name in Northwest Semitic languages.⁶⁶ After considerable debate, the consensus is moving in the direction of seeing a consort with Yahweh, a female divinity called Asherah.⁶⁷ If so, this would be quite a parallel to Ugarit in which El, the head of the pantheon, has Athirat (cognate with the Hebrew, Asherah) as his consort.

The biblical texts themselves suggest goddess worship in several passages by referring to ‘Asherah’, though at times this seems to designate a cult object, especially when appearing in the masculine plural (Asherim). Yet a number of passages refer to a goddess. 1 Kings 15:13 mentions the cult object made for Asherah. This was presumably in the temple, indeed, 2 Kings 23:4, 7 refers to vessels of Asherah (among others) and cult personnel dedicated to Asherah in the Jerusalem temple, and 2 Kings 21:7 also speaks of an image of Asherah in the temple. 1 Kings 18:19 designates “the prophets of Asherah”, alongside the prophets of Baal, which in context can only be a reference to a goddess. Thus, the biblical text itself preserves some evidence, if only residually, that Asherah was worshipped (even in the Jerusalem temple), most likely as a consort of Yahweh. Worship of the “host of heaven”, referred to in 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3; 23:4-5, is confirmed by solar symbols found on a number of Israelite seals (Keel and Uehlinger 1998, 282-309; Handy 1994; 1996). Jeremiah mentions worship of the “Queen of Heaven” who is likely to have been Asherah or Anat or perhaps even an amalgam of the two goddesses (Jer 44:17-19). Yet even though the text presents these as acts of apostasy, there is no hint that such worship was criticised or opposed at the time. If there was criticism, it was likely to have been by a minority movement, perhaps by a ‘Yhwh-alone movement’, as argued by Morton Smith (1971).

⁶⁶ Some have suggested alternative interpretations (for example, that the final letter – *h* is not ‘his’ but a so-called locative *he* or perhaps even a vowel letter), but others argue that the grammatical problems with a pronominal suffix can be overcome. See Zevit’s (2001, 363-66) discussion of the grammatical debate.

⁶⁷ Even if not everyone agrees. See, for instance, Keel and Uehlinger (1998, 281-82). Also see Handy’s (1994, 72-95) overview on Asherah’s position in the Ugaritic pantheon in *Among the Host of Heaven*. Of particular interest is his warning regarding the categorising of female deities as only functioning as fertility or nurturing mother-earth goddesses. Handy and others have instead argued for a variety of functions, for ancient goddesses – for example, Anat, a warrior and hunter goddess, or Inanna who in addition to being a fertility goddess, is also a war goddess – and that simply reducing all female deities to the reproductive or child-rearing function is in fact a construction of modern Western culture. Similarly I argue that the construal of God from the Bible is also, largely, a modern construct. What becomes important in (re)tracing the genealogy or birth of the gods and their function, is the identification of why such functions are necessary and what is at stake in creating and maintaining such a representation. See also Day (2002) *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, and Dever (2005) *Did God Have a Wife?*

Another indication of the existence of deities other than Yahweh in Israelite religion is an inscription of Sargon II relating to the fall of Samaria ca. 722 BCE. The Nimrud Prism states as follows:

29. [Wit]h the power of the great gods, my [lord]s,
30. [aga]inst them I foug[ht].
31. [2]7, 280 persons with [their] chariots
32. and the gods of their confidence as spoil
33. I counted. (Nimrud Prism 4.29-33, minor restoration indicated)⁶⁸

It was normative practice for Assyrians to remove the divine images of the people they conquered, often melting them down for the metal. The most reasonable interpretation in the context is that these referred to images of the Samarian gods. That is, the temple(s) of the Samaritans contained images of more than one god, and the Assyrians took these away as spoil as was their custom. And, finally, the Jewish military colony at Elephantine was almost certainly pre-Persian, being established during the Neo-Babylonian or possibly even the Assyrian period before the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 BCE. The community at Elephantine had its own temple to *Yhw* until it was destroyed by local Egyptians (*TAD* A4.7-9 = *AP* 30-32)⁶⁹; whether it was ever rebuilt, remains unknown. However, a list of contributors to the cult indicates that other divinities also had a place, including, for instance, Eshem-Bethel and Anat-Bethel (*TAD* C3.15:127-8 = *AP* #22:124-5) and Anat-Yahu (*TAD* B7.3:3 = *AP* #44:3). It has been suggested that these were hypostases of Yahweh (cf. Porten 1968, 179). This is a difficult matter to resolve, partly because these names occur only here – they ceased to have much function in the Elephantine religion (Bolin 1996; Lindenberg 2003, 61-79; Grabbe 2007, 158-160). They no doubt originated as goddess figures, but they may have been developed in other ways.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ See Bob Becking (1997; 2002) for philological details about the Nimrud Prism IV: 25-41. A number of other fragmentary clay prisms were discovered in excavations at Nimrud in 1952-53. Two fragments form two prisms: D (comprised of ND 2601 + 3401 + 3417) and E (comprised of ND 3400 + 3402 + 3409). These two prisms duplicate and fortunately allow restoration of a more continuous text. See K. Lawson Younger, Jr.'s (2003) "Nimrud Prisms D & E".

⁶⁹ *TAD* is the abbreviation for Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni's (1986-99) *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, vols. 1-4. *AP* refers to the corresponding texts by A. Cowley (1923) *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*

⁷⁰ See Grabbe (2004, 241-42) for a discussion of their possible usage.

Conclusion

Having so far traced an array of the biblical claims of monotheism, in conjunction with some of the specific examples or events which also appear to unsettle such claims to exclusivity, it is evident that claims of monotheism as an early or later development within the ancient political and religious contexts of Israel and Judah continue to be problematic for scholarship grounded in historical-critical and conservative theological traditions of interpretation. This is, as defined in the previous chapter, interpretation concerned with establishing the origin and end points – as if these could offer definitive markers of deity – of the theo-political and of monotheism's development. It has furthermore been made clear that monotheistic statements within biblical texts and their literary traditions themselves also resist reconciliation and unification. This is clearly attested to in the examples I have considered above, examples that work to demonstrate that textual and artefactual remnants of other gods and goddesses were present during times when a monotheistic agenda had variously been claimed (or retrojected) to be either burgeoning or exclusive in its operation. One problem for monotheism at this juncture, then, is that God is being presented as both the One and Only, and as more than One. Questions surrounding the one-ness of God – as a quality of, say, uniqueness, or as quantifiable, say, as the only one – have been vigorously debated throughout Jewish and Christian theology. One theological discourse in particular, negative theology, and its predecessor, Neoplatonism, have struggled to conceptualise and reconcile such problems of the One. Chapter Four will thus trace some of the ways these thinkers have tried to reconcile the problematic of the One so as to retain a certain metaphysical conception of God as the One and Only. Chapter Four will also take note of where such attempts rebound on and begin to disrupt themselves.

Chapter Four

The Theological (Re)Turn

Discursively Framing One-ness

The previous chapters have used a genealogical lens to trace the dimensions and interconnections of a range of monotheistic claims and interpretations constructed within selected biblical texts, as well as various of the core discursive practices used to construct and ratify the monotheistic tradition. In particular, the previous chapter exposed how biblical texts and their literary traditions – despite explicit claims of/toward God as One and Only – concurrently also disrupt the monotheistic drive towards a logic of the One. Thus it was in Chapter Three that I demonstrated that God is presented, biblically, as *both* the One and Only, and as *more* than One. I also drew attention in that chapter to some of the interlinking between those ancient theo-political contexts in ancient Israel and Judah which led to the development of one-God thinking, as well as the language utilised to espouse one-ness at the expense of other possibilities, and the legitimations of particular construals of identity and presencing (of the One God and of the Israelite community). These explorations made visible a number of problems which were particularly noticeable in theo-political attempts to articulate God as One and Only, particularly with regards to construals and attributes of identity and identification. It was made apparent, in other words, that such construals present multiplicity not Oneness, and in fact mark a palimpsestuous map of the extant remnants of other gods and possibilities. Having so far traced this map (and its problematics) through the lenses of both biblical and extra-biblical (canonical) assumptions, materials, and discourses, this chapter marks a shift in focus. More specifically, it turns to what can be called the *via negativa* (negative way). This – to be articulated through several of the traditions of Negative Theology – marks a suite of attempts to negatively map the identity and presencing canonically attributed to the One and Only God of monotheism.

As already noted, this chapter is part of my mapping of monotheism in genealogical terms, a focus that has previously detailed scholarship's focus on

recounting a purportedly progressive development of monotheistic practices in ancient Israel, as well as tracing the appeals within texts and traditions to ancestors and past covenantal structures that are themselves reliant on progressive accounts of identity and presence.¹ I have striven to show, however, that these discursive articulations of monotheism's texts and traditions struggle to create and maintain 'God' as a clear and identifiable presence.² The trouble is that, as seen in the previous chapter on texts and traditions, this identity and presence is always already disrupted by the remnants of other gods and goddesses, as well as by practices that are not monotheistic, all of which work to undermine the foregrounded construction of God as One and Only. Such destabilising of the 'clear' identity and presence of God is a reminder that claims made on and for God as the One and Only are always deeply problematic. As will be introduced in this chapter, and considered more deeply in later chapters, perhaps explicit claims to a clearly identifiable and present God and the logic of the One and Only can only cohere against a discursive structure of a God which must remain hidden and beyond human understanding, even as this latter subtends and fractures construals of the former. As in previous chapters, this chapter elaborates this *via negativa* with reference to both biblical and extra-biblical materials, but also with reference to broader onto-theological traditions. Through these various discursive construals, however, my focus remains on tracing their capacities for stabilising (and destabilising) the construed logic and presence of a monotheistic God, even when that God remains hidden.

The Hidden God and Negative Theology

The tradition of the hidden God has strong roots in the Hebrew texts. Recall, for instance, that Moses is not allowed to look upon Yahweh's face, and indeed that there

¹ The idea of progress in many biblical narratives and discourses can be traced through key tropes such as the promise of lineage through descendants and land. For example, 'begetting' is one form of ancestral claim that moves both forwards and backwards in time. It points to identity claims of chosenness framed as future descendants, abundance, and resilience, and it looks backwards to bestow legitimacy and authority to the 'now', in order to legitimate current and future actions. The divine right of kings is one such example of the functioning of genealogical or originary theo-political claims, another would be the reclaiming of Palestinian land by the modern state of Israel. The latter is a claim that rests on the appeal to both texts and traditions explicating Yahweh's promise of land to the Israelites. In this sense, then, a claim to hold a particular identity is a claim that is both a forwards and backwards looking socio-political movement, one that is inescapably ideological and teleological. These aspects of claiming legitimation will be addressed in greater detail from Chapter Six onwards.

² Nearly all conceptions of truth in the history of philosophy have centred on the knower in some sense being *present* to the object of knowledge. This privileging of presence is one of assumptions under debate throughout this thesis, as well as marking a significant issue for many of the thinkers I am discussing.

are numerous instances throughout the texts of the Hebrew Bible that draw upon the hiding of God's face (for example, Isa 45:15, 64:7; Ps 88:14; and Mic 3:4).³ In Exodus 33:11-23 Moses asks to see Yahweh's glory. Yahweh replies that no one can see his face and live, but agrees to place Moses in the cleft of a rock and shield him with his hand as he passes by. The presentation of Yahweh's back to Moses has been interpreted by Jewish commentators – such as Rashi, Rambam, Ramban, Rashbam, and Sforno – as demonstrating the degree of perception granted Moses by Yahweh.⁴ Many further narrative exchanges in Exodus between Moses and Yahweh also centre upon access to perception, raising questions about human capacity to perceive and/or comprehend the presence of God.⁵ These passages form part of a larger body of petitions by Moses to Yahweh: “So that I may comprehend ...” (33:12), and Yahweh's response to Moses in such exchanges suggests that there were limits to what the greatest prophet in the Judaic tradition could perceive. Moses thus instantiates a key question as to whether God's presence can be mapped discursively.

Negative theology or the *via negativa* is a theological tradition that tackles these questions by insisting that the divine cannot be understood in human terms because it is radically transcendent. The use of ‘radically transcendent’ here refers to the philosophical tradition of ‘the wholly other’, a tradition I will be returning to in later chapters of this dissertation. For example, for Aquinas, Luther and Calvin, God remains radically transcendent or wholly other in the sense that, for them, God can only mean a radical transcendence, a mystery whose being (and, under a Christian schema, whose

³ The motif of the hidden God – whether of the God who hides his face, as in these examples, or in terms of the concealed God of no graven image – has a strong presence in ancient Near Eastern literature. The work of Keel and Uehlinger (1998) in *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* is a useful resource for tracking the transmission of the hidden God particularly at the Amun Temple in Gaza during Iron Age I, where cryptographically written forms of divine names came to prominence. Later, Egyptian use of the temple declined but Philistine use of at least some cultic practices continued in the Ramesside Period (Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties 1292-1069 BCE). It is thought “The cult of this Egyptian deity [Amun] may have influenced the cult of the Canaanite El, who was thought of in a similar way and then consequently might have an impact on the way Yahweh was conceived” (Keel and Uehlinger 1998, 113-144). For the early connection between El and Yahweh, see Mark S. Smith (1990, 7-12); de Moor (1990, 30-34, 223-260); and Edelman (1996a).

⁴ These are key figures in Jewish commentary: ‘Rashi’ is an acronym for Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040-1104 CE) a commentator on the Bible and Talmud from Spain; ‘Rambam’ or Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204 CE) also known as Maimonides, a Halakhic codifier, philosopher and commentator on the Mishnah from Spain and Egypt; ‘Ramban’ is an acronym for Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, also known as Nahmanides (ca. 1194-1270 CE), a philosopher, halakhist, and Bible commentator from Spain; ‘Rashbam’ an acronym for Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (1080-1174 CE) grandson of Rashi, commentator on the Bible and Talmud from Northern France; and Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno (ca. 1470-1550 CE), a Bible commentator from Italy.

⁵ These verses regarding God's presence – for example, Moses' many requests that God himself and not an angel or intermediary accompany and protect Israel – are, I argue, closely tied to the concept of election. In particular, Moses' request that God's people be made distinct (Ex 33:14-15), and that they are placed on a different level to other nations (Ex 33:16-17), will be explored further in Chapter Five.

love) lies beyond human – discursive – understanding. For Aquinas, this is the unknowable God, and he writes in his *Summa Theologiae* (1:3):

Having recognized that something exists, we still have to investigate the way in which it exists, so that we may come to understand what it is that exists. But we cannot know what God is, only what he is not. We must therefore consider the ways in which God does not exist rather than the ways in which he does. (in Davies and Leftow 2006, 28)

For Luther, it is about the cross and the hidden God when he writes:

[W]e have to argue in one way about God or the will of God as preached, revealed, offered, and worshipped, and in another way about God as he is not preached, not revealed, not offered, not worshipped. To the extent, therefore, that God hides himself and will to be unknown to us, it is no business of ours. (1957a, 139)

And for Calvin's (1989) particular rhetoric of faith, it was about God's magisterial sovereignty when he wrote about *Deus absconditus*⁶ due to the wickedness of human action in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Such a theology – concerned as it is with both determining (prescribing) and understanding (or exploring) the presence of God – comprises another core discourse for the genealogy of monotheism, this one part of a long tradition of reflection upon Being, God, humanity, and religion seeking insight into an ultimate, final reality (the divine stuff, cause, or source) from which all beings come, and from which they derive their meaning and purpose.⁷

Negative theology, then, is the attempt to approach the divine not through positive delineation – as, for example, detailed in previous chapters – but by what is identified as negative language. This is paradoxical or contradictory language, often accompanied by an insistence on the inadequacy of all language to describe God's transcendence.⁸ It is in this sense, then, that negative theology is a theology that says

⁶ This is the 'hidden god', the god who has consciously left this world to hide elsewhere. See Chapter Two 78n33.

⁷ Negative theology can be considered philosophical theology. The relevance of negative theology for post-Kantian thinking generally – and for this dissertation in particular – lies in its breaking through the limits of Greek thought on Being as will be explored in this chapter. The tradition of negative theology is nourished by a fundamental intuition diametrically opposed to the main line of classical Greek philosophy: what human desire seeks – the divine, the highest Being – cannot be defined, pronounced or known, because it is radically transcendent. For an array of discussions of these issues, see Oliver Davies and Denys Turner's (eds., 2004) *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*, and Nahum Brown and J. Aaron Simmons' (eds., 2017) *Contemporary Debates in Negative Theology and Philosophy*.

⁸ Interestingly, Christian writers in the seventeenth century, since they did not want to think of God as utterly beyond their comprehension, thought of God's otherness in terms of distance and remoteness from the world. Though they did not use the terms, they were in effect contrasting *transcendence* with

what God is not rather than what God is. It is an *apophatic*⁹ discourse that insists on God's radical otherness from all human descriptions of God, affirming God's absolute unknowability, incomprehensibility, and irreducibility to human thought. Merold Westphal demonstrates this strain of thought within negative theology when he argues:

We must think God as the mystery that exceeds the wisdom of the Greeks. We must think God as the voice that exceeds vision so as to establish a relation irreducible to comprehension. We must think God as the gift of love who exceeds not merely the images but also the concepts with which we aim at God. (2002, 266-267)

This tradition tries to find different ways to approach what is framed by its proponents as 'the ultimate mystery'. For example, mystics of the Middle Ages represented the ultimate mystery by emphasising the unknowableness, the unutterableness, and the deep darkness of transcendent Being, suggesting thereby that transcendence is best approached via denials, via what *is not*. Denying what is given, speaking in contradiction, and using the *alpha privans* – rendered in English as the 'un-'/ 'in-'/ 'a-' as in 'unthinkable', 'unnameable', 'invisible', 'unspeakable', even 'amoral' – were recognised means for evoking transcendent or hidden entities.

This chapter, then, will consider the negative theological tradition as a multi-faceted discourse attempting to inscribe – and protect – God's status as the One and Only (and as incomprehensible because One and Only). Given that this is an extremely complex tradition, enduring from late antiquity and the early Christian period, through Neoplatonism and the apophatic focus of the Middle Ages, to the contemporary theological turn of the later twentieth-century, my initial focus here will be to map two early articulations of the tradition: firstly that found in classical antiquity with Proclus and Plotinus, and, secondly, that found in the Middle Ages with Aquinas, Pseudo-Dionysius and Meister Eckhart. These articulations will bring to the fore the core issue informing this chapter: that even such non-construals of the One and Only run into

immanence. Such a "contrastive" account of transcendence – I am using Kathryn Tanner's (1988, 89) terminology – makes claims about divine transcendence and involvement in the world into a zero-sum exchange: the more involved or immanent, the less transcendent, and vice versa.

⁹ The word 'apophatic' refers to the knowledge of God obtained through negative concepts that might be applied to him, such as 'God cannot be bound by time'. It is derived from the Greek words *apophatikos* or 'negative' and *apophasis* or 'denial, negative', and from the root words *apo* 'other than' and *phanai*, to 'speak'. Apophatic thinking moves from the Greek to the Latin use of *via negativa* or *via negationis* as theology comes to the fore. Apophatic or negative thinking is often positioned in contradistinction to kataphatic thinking. The word 'kataphatic' refers to knowledge of God obtained through defining God with positive statements such as 'God is merciful', or 'God is good and loving'. Kataphatic comes from the Greek *kataphatikos* or 'affirmative', and *kataphasis* or 'affirmation', with roots derived from *kata* (operating as an intensifier) and, again, *phanai*, to 'speak'.

problems concerning identity and presencing. As I will also show, these issues, reframed, are also peculiarly explicit in what I am here calling the *via moderna*, the new schema of thought brought in by Enlightenment thinkers which strives to complete the *via negativa*'s division of reason from being. The resonances between these two schamas will finally be mapped to show their culmination in the apophysis of Søren Kirkegaard in the nineteenth century, a vital thinker in the relationship between premodern and postmodern articulations of the *via negativa*. The chapter will conclude with a consideration of some of the implications of this entwining of the *via negativa* with the *via moderna*, gesturing towards some of the aporetic disruptions to discursive monotheism that Kiekegaard's work prefaces and which will be foregrounded in the following chapters.

The Neoplatonic Foreground to Negative Theology

The Pythagoreans ... hold that the elements of number are the even and the odd, and that of these the latter is limited, and the former unlimited; and that the One proceeds from both of these (for it is both even and odd), and number from the One; and that the whole heaven, as has been said, is numbers. (Aristotle 1984a, 4331 [*Metaphysics*, Book Ia.5])

It also lies in the very nature of the ... [Greek philosophical] ... enterprise that one tries to explain the world in terms of as few principles as possible. (Frede 1999, 47)

Negative theology is a tradition with sources reaching back to late antiquity and the early Christian period. It reached its high point in the Neoplatonic philosophy and theology that held sway in the third century CE and for long afterward, with its most radical representatives being found among the mystics of the Middle Ages. The term 'negative theology' is easy to misunderstand and is in need of clarification. Marking a counterpoint to the historical and theo-political monotheistic discourses examined earlier, negative theology is less a religious current and more a tradition of reflection on Being, God, presencing, and humanity. It is a 'theology' hence concerned with a desired philosophical insight into an ultimate, final Reality (the divine stuff, cause, or source from which all beings come and from which they derive their meaning), therefore encompassing the areas of philosophy traditionally known as ontology and metaphysics, as well as the area that is now called theology. Negative theology can thus be

considered philosophical theology. The relevance of negative theology for this genealogy lies in its proposed disruptions of the limits of Greek thought on Being, disruptions that, first introduced here, will be examined again in some of their various retrievals by post-Kantian thinkers. In summation, the negative theology tradition is nourished by a fundamental intuition that would appear diametrically opposed to the main lines of both biblical monotheism and ancient Greek philosophy: what human desire seeks – the divine, the highest Being – cannot be defined, pronounced or known, because it is radically transcendent. This is to say that negative theology rejects Parmenides’ dictum that Being and thought are one. These early insights are briefly outlined below.

Plato arguably inaugurates the tradition of thought that will lead to the *via negativa* in the *Phaedo* with his concept of philosophy as the soul’s desire to ascend to its divine origin through the θεωρία (*theoria* or contemplation) of the Ideal Forms (Plato 1997b; 1997d). Plato’s *Seventh Letter* says, however, that the act of *theoria* cannot finally comprehend the Ideal, because the Form of the Good is unknowable, leading to an emphasis on the incomprehensibility of ultimate reality that resonates in Neoplatonism (Plato 1997a; Gerson 1996, 41). Although Platonism thereby introduces key elements into the philosophy of negation (such as ideas of knowledge by abstraction), it is with Neoplatonism that a negative way to knowledge of the transcendent is articulated most explicitly. The first principle in Neoplatonism is the One (το ἓν, *to hen*), the principle that produces all Being. For this reason, the Neoplatonists thought that the One could not itself be a being. If it were a being, they argued, it would have a particular nature, and so could not be universally productive of all being (Bulhof & ten Kate 2000; Dillon & Gerson 2004).¹⁰ ‘Beyond being’,¹¹ it is also considered beyond thought, because thinking requires determinations that belong to being: the division between subject and object, and the distinction of one thing from another. For this reason, even the name ‘the One’ cannot be a positive name, but rather the most non-multiple name we can think of, a name derived from our own inadequate conception of the simplicity of the first principle. The One causes all things by conferring unity, in the form of individuality, on them, and in Neoplatonism existence,

¹⁰ *Neoplatonic Philosophy*, edited by Dillon and Gerson (2004), provides a snapshot of Neoplatonic readings. With reference to the issue of One and being see: Porphyry’s Frs. IV-VI from “Commentary on Parmenides” (Porphyry 2004, 205-211); Iamblichus’ Fr. 2B from “From Damascius” *On Principles* (Iamblichus 2004, 248-249), and Proclus’ Book I, 617-659 and Book VI, 1043-1051 from “Commentary on Parmenides” (Proclus 2004, 292-330).

¹¹ The phrase ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, *epekeina tes ousias* (‘beyond being’) is from Plato’s *Republic* Book VI, 509^b (1997d, 1, 925).

unity, and form tend to become equivalent. The One causes things to exist by donating unity, and the particular manner in which a thing is one is its form (a cat and a house are one in different ways, for example). Under Neoplatonism, the One confers individuality, however it is in reality the principle of plurality. This is because the One makes things exist by giving them the unity that makes them what they are, as distinct and separate beings. Neoplatonists thought of it also as the source of the good of everything, so the other name for the One is ‘the Good’.¹² This first principle is not double or more than One, but all things have a double relation to it: they come from it (the One) and are then oriented back towards it to receive their perfection or completion (the Good).

Proclus and Plotinus are central in the reconfiguration of Platonic thought that is of importance to the project of negative theology. For Proclus, what is important is his insertion of a level of individual ones, called *henads*, between the One itself and the divine intellect, this level comprising for him the second principle. Henads are ‘beyond being’,¹³ like the One itself, but stand at the head of chains of causation (*seirai*) and in some manner give to these chains their particular character. They are also identified with the traditional Greek gods, so one henad might be Apollo and be the cause of all things apollonian, while another might be Helios and be the cause of all sun-like things. The henads thus serve both to protect the One itself from any hint of multiplicity, and to draw up the rest of the universe towards the One, instantiating a connecting, intermediate stage between absolute unity and determinate multiplicity. For Proclus, then, the One is like a combination of the Platonic Form of the Good, because of its conferral of being and intelligibility on all things, and Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover, as the *final cause* of all things (Proclus 2004, 292-330 [*Parmenides*, VI.1046-1051]). Coming between the One and the henads are the two principles of First Infinity and First Limit, these being the principles of fertile production (ἄπειρον, *aperion*: immeasurable, infinite, unlimited or indefinite), and the controlled nature of the production (πέρας, *peras*: end, limit or boundary) of all things (ibid.).

Plotinus in turn intensifies the Platonic notion of the transcendence of the Forms by conceiving the One as absolutely transcendent origin (Plotinus 2004, 98-100 [*Enneads*, V.3 §13]). It is Plotinus’ position that the One extends itself by the famous

¹² Plotinus is presented as finding the principle of the One in Plato’s *Republic* (1997d) where it is named ‘the Idea of the Good’ and in *Parmenides* (1997b) where it is the subject of a series of deductions (137^{eff}). The One or the Good, owing to its simplicity, is indescribable directly. It can only be grasped indirectly by deducing what it is not (see Books V.3 §14; VI.8; VI.9 §3 in Plotinus 2004).

¹³ ‘Beyond being’ is an important concept that continues to have currency in both modern and post-Kantian thinking on Being, reality, metaphysics and post-metaphysics. I shall be returning to this phrase throughout this chapter and in Chapters Five and Six.

process of emanation into various lower levels of being, with each lower level being a weaker extended expression of the level immediately above it. He emphasises more strongly than Plato that the One transcends all being and is not itself a being, and that beings owe their existence to the contemplation of it (however imperfect). Plotinus also introduces the idea that negative formulations constitute a form of knowledge superior to positive ones and that negative examples can be used to affirm the transcendent status of the One.¹⁴ Plotinus thus taught that there is a supreme, totally transcendent One, containing no division, multiplicity or distinction; likewise ‘being’ beyond all categories of being and non-being. Under this view, the concept of being is derived by us from the objects of human experience, the latter called the *dyad* (δύαδ) (representing the number two or otherness), and an attribute of such objects, but the infinite, transcendent One is beyond all such objects, and therefore beyond the concepts that we derive from them.¹⁵ Consequently the One cannot be any existing thing, and cannot be merely the sum of all such things, being prior rather to all existents (ibid. III.8 §9, 45-47). No attributes can be assigned to the One, it can only be identified with the Good and the principle of Beauty (ibid. I.6 §9, 28-30). For example, thought cannot be attributed to the One because thought implies distinction between a thinker and an object of thought (again dyad). Even the self-contemplating intelligence (the νόησις of the νοῦς) must contain duality. “Once you have uttered ‘The Good,’ add no further thought: by any addition, and in proportion to that addition, you introduce a deficiency” (ibid. III.8 §11, 48-49). Plotinus thereby denies sentience, self-awareness or any other action (ἔργον *ergon*) to the One (V.6 §6), insisting rather that it be called sheer *dunamis* (δύναμις) or potentiality without which nothing could exist (ibid. III.8 §10, 47). As Plotinus explains (e.g., V.6

¹⁴ Proclus’ *Platonic Theology*, for example, pursues the Platonic model of hyper-negativity to a more radical conclusion by insisting that even the negations themselves ultimately have to be negated because, as products of logic and language, they ultimately reveal nothing about the One (in Proclus 2004, 283-86). Additionally, Proclus’ treatise “On the Generation and Order of the Things That Come After the First” (2(11) §1-23), consists of his elaboration of his fundamental principles of metaphysics – the One, Intellect, and Soul – and that there must be a first, absolutely simple, principle of all (cf. Plato’s *Parmenides* 160^B2-3 in Plato 1997b). Proclus’ thought concludes that, since neither affirmations nor negations offer any access to reality, they must ultimately give way to silence. Damascius (that is, Iamblichus via Damascius) pursues an even more uncompromising line of thought that insists that affirmation and negation are both simply products of an emotional or psychological desire for knowledge on the part of the knower and provide no ontological understanding whatsoever of the transcendent status of the One. Damascius concludes that the real point is not to profess knowledge or ignorance of the One’s Being, but to attain a state of epistemological ‘hyper-ignorance’ where the subject recognises the limits of what he or she can possibly know and not know (Iamblichus 2004, 260-62).

¹⁵ “Numenius of Apamea said that Pythagoras gave the name of Monad to God, and the name of Dyad to matter” (Chalcidius r. 52, 5-24 in Kahn 2001, 172). Aristotle equated matter as the formation of the elements (energies) into the material world as the static material was formed by the energies being acted upon by force or motion. Late Neoplatonic philosophers and Idealists such as Plotinus treated the dyad as a second cause (*демиурге*) which the divine mind (*ноус*) that via a reflective nature (finiteness) causes matter to appear or become perceivable. See Roger Miller Jones (1918) for an in-depth discussion on the relationship between Chalcidius and Numenius in “Chalcidius and Neo-Platonism”.

§3), it is impossible for the One to be Being or a self-aware Creator God. Plotinus (V.6 §4) also compares the One to “light”, the Divine *Nous* (first will towards Good) to the “Sun”, and lastly the Soul to the “Moon” whose light is merely “a derivative conglomeration of light from the ‘Sun’” (ibid.). It is his proposal that the first light could exist without any celestial body.

The One, being beyond all attributes including being and non-being, is the source of the world, but not through any act of creation, wilful or otherwise, since activity cannot be ascribed to the unchangeable, immutable One. Plotinus argues instead that the multiple cannot exist without the simple. The less perfect must, of necessity, emanate, or issue forth, from the perfect or more perfect. Thus, all of creation emanates from the One in succeeding stages of lesser and lesser perfection. These stages are not temporally isolated, but occur throughout time as a constant process. Plotinus here resolves the issues between Plato’s ontology and Aristotle’s *Actus et potentia*¹⁶ (the issue being that Aristotle, through resolving Parmenides’ Third Man argument against Plato’s forms and ontology, created a second philosophical school of thought). Plotinus thus reconciles the Good over the Demiurge from Plato’s *Timaeus* (1997e) with Aristotle’s static unmoved mover of *Actus et potentia*. That is, he makes the potential or force (*dunamis*) the Monad¹⁷ or One, and the demiurge or *dyad* the action or energy component in philosophical cognitive ontology. Later Neoplatonic philosophers, especially Iamblichus, added hundreds of intermediate beings as emanations between the One and humanity.

The *via negativa*’s emergence as a distinct theological tradition, however, occurred in the cross-fertilisation between Greek Neoplatonism and Christian revelation in the first centuries of the new millennium. Indeed, it has been argued that the *via negativa* is above all the product of this intellectual dialogue between Neoplatonist and Christian concepts regarding the human relationship to ultimate reality. Negative theology, then, as the term is understood today, is the result of an imaginative philosophical synthesis between the Christian concept of the revelation (of the Christ) and the Neoplatonic concept of the transcendence of the One. Christian Neoplatonism attempts to strike a balance between a Christian God who is absolutely revealed to

¹⁶ The phrase *Actus et potentia* is an expression in Aristotelian and Scholasticism where *potentia* expresses a potential or capacity, a non-realised possibility for which there is still an ability. It is used to translate Aristotle’s *energeia* (ἐνέργεια) or *entelecheia* (ἐντελέχεια), and *dunamis* (δύναμις).

¹⁷ According to the Pythagoreans, Monad (from the Greek μονάς or *monas*, ‘unit’ from μόνος or *monos* ‘alone’) was a term for God or the first being, or the totality of beings – ‘monad’ being the source or the One (meaning without distinction). *Nous* is a philosophical term for mind or intellect. The use is somewhat ambiguous, as a result of being appropriated by successive philosophers to designate very different concepts.

humanity through scripture and the doctrine of incarnation, and a Neoplatonic God who is beyond all being and who flows out into being hierarchically according to the theory of emanation.¹⁸

Negative Theology in the Late Middle Ages

Negative theology's position becomes increasingly complex and difficult to track on both theological and institutional levels in the medieval period. It is clear that Neoplatonism is the main influence on Christian negative theology from the second to the eleventh centuries but the beginning of the twelfth century sees the reintroduction of the *Corpus Aristotelicum* into Western culture. If Aristotelian philosophy is undoubtedly highly influential upon medieval apophaticism, Christian Neoplatonist assumptions about the transcendence and unknowability of God and the existence of finite things by way of their degree of participation in the existence of God persist in the extensive bodies of work from Thomas Aquinas¹⁹ and Meister Eckhart.

Aquinas famously provides the first synthesis of Christian doctrine and Aristotelian philosophy but Christian Neoplatonism endured in his corpus through the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius. Aquinas reconfigures Pseudo-Dionysius' distinction between *apophasis*²⁰ and *kataphasis*²¹ by identifying two complementary approaches to understanding the nature of God, namely the *via remotionis* (or way of removing), and the *via affirmationis* (or the way of affirmation). On the one hand, the *via remotionis* emphasises that God must be approached negatively because, under Aristotelian thinking, all knowledge proceeds from sensory experience and, for Aquinas in particular, God absolutely exceeds sensory experience (Aquinas 2006 [*The Names of*

¹⁸ Most negative theologians, despite their problem with thinking about Being, kept the idea of emanation, the idea that the Source presupposes a cause and a goal – a source that may or may not take the shape of a personal, Christian, God. It is striking that in Damascius the tradition of negative theology appears to encompass the possibility of surpassing thinking about Being (see Rappe 2000).

¹⁹ Aquinas was a Dominican friar and significant medieval philosopher and theologian. His writings, which attempt to adapt Aristotle's philosophy to a Christian setting, are the basis for modern Thomism and constitute the semi-official philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church. His principal works are *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles* (see Aquinas 1997a and 1997b).

²⁰ As previously mentioned, *apophasis* is a Latin rendition of the Greek *αποφασις*, from *αποφάναι* 'to say no' and is broadly speaking a kind of logical reasoning or argument that utilises denial to 'mention without mentioning'. Apophatic theology thus sees God as ineffable and attempts to describe God in terms of what God is not. Apophatic statements refer to transcendence and are opposed to *kataphasis*, which refers to immanence.

²¹ In contrast to apophatic theology, as previously noted, kataphatic theology seeks to express God through positive terms such as 'God is love'. However, under the schemata of negative theology, kataphatic terminology is considered to place limits on God by stating what God is rather than what God might be.

God, I. Q13.A1]; also see Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, 133-135 [*Mystical Theology*, I.1]; 47-50 [*Divine Names*, I.1]).²² Under this way of conceptualising God, God is not an object of sensory knowledge and so therefore lacks the composition that characterises finite beings.²³ This is to argue that God is not a composition of spatial or temporal parts because God must be immaterial and timeless. In addition, God is not a composition of actuality and potentiality because of being wholly immutable, and is not a composition of essence and existence because, famously, God's essence *is* God's existence.²⁴ If sensible knowledge cannot provide any direct knowledge of God, Aquinas' proof of God's existence from motion insists that sensible things are still effects of God and thus can be used to elicit knowledge of him indirectly or analogously as their first cause (Aquinas 1997a, 21-24 [*Summa Theologica* 1, Q2, A3]). On the other hand, the *via affirmationis* concentrates on what can positively be affirmed of God on the basis that God as first cause possesses, in an unlimited sense, all the perfections that finite creatures possess as his effects. He can be affirmed through the famous theory of analogy as pure perfection (wise, good, intelligent, and so on) (1997a, 42-50 [specifically *Summa Theologica* I, Q5, 6]). Furthermore, he is affirmed as pre-eminent in perfection (first cause, unmoved mover, and so on) (1997a, 37-41 [*Summa Theologica* I, Q4]), and finally, he is affirmed as perfect in a wholly simple manner (wisdom itself, goodness itself, and so forth) (1997a, 25-36 [*Summa Theologica* I. Q3]).

As these points suggest, the high point of the Christian negative theological tradition in the early Christian period is to be found in the work of the Pseudo-Dionysius, also known as Dionysius the Areopagite. His texts served as the foundation on which negative theology could grow in philosophy and theology, with one result being the recent theological turn experienced in the field of phenomenological enquiry.²⁵ His influence was extensive throughout the Middle Ages in the Greek

²² See especially Chapters Five and Six in Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* where he is concerned with negative theology in action, negating first sensible things and their characteristics, before moving on to divine names and theological representations.

²³ See "On the Simplicity of God" (Aquinas 1997a, 25-36 [*Summa Theologica* 1. Q3]).

²⁴ "All are proportionately dependent upon God whose relation between his essence and his existence is one of identity. Because he exists essentially, God is the only giver of existence" (Aquinas in Clark 2000, 25). See Thomas Hibbs (2007) "Metaphysics, Theology, and the Practice of Naming God" for an excellent orientation to Aquinas' legacy through to Jean-Luc Marion's work.

²⁵ Without a trace of doubt one of the most important and influential movements in later twentieth century continental philosophy is represented by the new French Phenomenology, and by this I have in mind authors such as Emmanuel Lévinas or Paul Ricœur, but also Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louis Chrétien and Jean-Yves Lacoste. Their shared focus is their care and predilection for those phenomena that supposedly were inappropriately described or even completely neglected by classical phenomenology – for instance those phenomena that belong to theological discourse. It is precisely this expansion of the field of investigation that also gave rise to critiques such as the one formulated by Dominique Janicaud who spoke of an illegitimate "theological turn of French phenomenology" (Janicaud et al. 2000). Replies came both from some of the authors mentioned above and from those researchers

Orthodox world, and to a lesser extent in the Latin western world. His influence in the West may be traced through the work of Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, and John of the Cross, although this influence had dissipated well before Descartes. Although interest in his work has recently revived, with it being engaged with by contemporary thinkers as diverse as Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, John D. Caputo, Emmanuel Levinas and Kevin Hart, it does remain an enigma in the history of thought how this current in negative theology – important for so many centuries – was eventually all but forgotten in the West. Raoul Mortley wonders, “Why has the West lost its own tradition of trans-linguistic mysticism, so that it turns to Buddhism for what it once possessed as its own” (1986, 15-16). Mortley nonetheless recognises negative theology as “a cultural undercurrent” (220), writing that “the Dionysian tradition has become a cultural undercurrent emerging at times, but which always maintains the capacity to influence and redirect” (ibid.).²⁶

The Pseudo-Dionysius tried to link the core of the Christian faith – the idea of Incarnation – to Neoplatonism. He wanted to tell the Christian story as a philosophy – as, that is, a non-mythological story – and he sought a link between Christian faith and the religious thinking about and experience of God as absolute transcendence, as ‘being’ on the other side of Being and reality. He tried to think ‘beyond being’. Given his *telos* it is possible to claim that he tried to free the idea of God from the philosophy of Being. Here lies his meaning and appeal for later generations of thinkers (even to the present if we take into account the recent (re)turn to religion in phenomenology). For the Pseudo-Dionysius, then, ‘Christ’ – the Word that was with God from the beginning, on the other side of being – emerged from secrecy into human form, becoming visible to humanity. And yet, the Pseudo-Dionysius contended, even after his appearance Christ remained hidden. What ‘really’ was said, still remained unsaid; what ‘really’ was known, remained unknown. Between the hidden and the unhidden being of Christ lies then a moment that is ‘not of our time’, ‘not of our world’. It is a moment in which the hidden and the unhidden exist side by side. The Pseudo-Dionysius emphasises this moment as

sympathetic with the so-called ‘theological turn’. A selection of the recent reactions from the latter group, together with some contributions concerned not so much with Janicaud’s critical position but with some questions regarding the concrete investigations of the extended area of phenomenology, are to be found in Bruce Ellis Benson and Norma Wirzba’s (2010) edited collection *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*.

²⁶ This capacity of negative theology that Mortley describes will be picked up again in Chapter Seven with my discussion of Derrida’s utilisation of Dionysian thinking for his re-thinking of *différance*. It will also be important for Chapter Eight.

“the sudden”, in the sense of a crash in time, an epiphany (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, 136-136).²⁷

One of the recurring issues for this dissertation in mapping the various discursive articulations informing and disrupting monotheism involves the question of whether it makes sense to think of names as indicators of convention or even ‘naturalness’ given the way they function. Whilst naming has been touched upon in Chapter Three (and will again be engaged with in Chapters Six and Seven), the Pseudo-Dionysius adopts a particular stance to the idea of divine naming in order to carry on the project of the *via negativa*. In *On The Divine Names* and *The Celestial Hierarchy* the Pseudo-Dionysius says that names are images – in the sense of copies – of an immaterial reality:

Now when we apply dissimilar similarities to intelligent beings, we say of them that they experience desire, but this has to be interpreted as a divine yearning for that immaterial reality which is beyond all reason and all intelligence. It is a strong and sure desire for the clear and impassible contemplations of the transcendent. It is a hunger for an unending, conceptual, and true communion with the spotless and sublime light, of clear and splendid beauty. (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, 151 [*The Celestial Hierarchy* 4.144a])

Names, then, are things that flow from Unity. They reflect, as all creatures that flow from the One, a higher principle, their Source. Names *are* and they *mean*. The Pseudo-Dionysius posited that divine names had a special meaning. Like all beings, they bear the stamp of spiritual beauty. Divine names are thus the basis for affirmative speech about God, for a positive *kataphatic* theology. Under a Christian thinking these special names are inspired by the Spirit, and they have a special effective power in that they are thought to unify the human spirit with the highest principles, with God. In this movement, human intellect is thought to move from nature towards the Good, just as all things according to their ability strive toward ‘analogy’ with the Good. For the Pseudo-Dionysius, then, analogy is a way of being for things, a proportion of being in relation to one another. The proportion permits knowledge, based on comparisons, and refers to a *via analogiae*: every being has its own relationship to the Good, and a suitable share

²⁷ Dionysius’ use of ‘the sudden’ is found in *Mystical Theology*, 1.3, Epistle III. Caputo picks up the idea of ‘the sudden’ as ‘the event’ in a number of recent works. See especially his *The Tears and Prayers of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (1997b), “Apostles of the Impossible: On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion” (1999), “What Do I Love When I Love My God? Deconstruction and Radical Orthodoxy” (2001), “Shedding Tears Beyond Being: Derrida’s Confession of Prayer” (2005), *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (2006b), and “Temporal Transcendence: The Very Idea of *à venir* in Derrida” (2007b). Also see “Education as Event: A Conversation with John D. Caputo by T. Wilson Dickinson” (2016).

of knowledge of the Good. For Dionysian thinking, analogy is the way by which creatures participate in God, as creatures are self-expressions of God through and in the various levels of reality. Analogy is expressed in love for, or orientation toward the Good, and it is inseparably linked with the creature's free will, with his or her desire for the Good. Under this thinking, analogy is above all an attitude, a being in harmony, a being 'in tune'. In this sense, the Pseudo-Dionysius is less directed than the thinking of, say, the last of the Neoplatonists, Damascius,²⁸ toward a complete rejection of all thinking about God and humanity in terms of Being. He is rather looking for an analogy between the divine Being and beings, an analogy that in his view emanates, proceeds 'naturally' – that is, according to the nature of the Names, the language God himself created – from divine Being.

In the context of Dionysian thinking, analogy thus has an ontological aspect.²⁹ For the Pseudo-Dionysius, God is not an object, and certainly not an object of knowledge. God is on the other side of being and therefore unknowable. There can be no question of a proportionality between God and creatures, as then God would be a being, a thing, an object. God – the hidden – can only be known via analogical participation in His reality.³⁰ It is important to situate the Dionysian concept of the effectiveness of divine names within the context of this notion of analogy: both help people who are oriented toward the Good to come closer to the Good, to God, and so

²⁸ Damascius' chief treatise is titled *Difficulties and Solutions of First Principles* (ἀπορίαι και λύσεις περὶ τῶν ἀρχῶν), and I refer here to the anthology compiled by Dillon and Gerson (2004), in which Damascius' *De Principiis* appears. It is an examination of the nature and attributes of God and the human soul.

²⁹ This can be contrasted with Aquinas' later purely epistemological use of analogy. See his use of divine names in later works, most notably the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Summa Theologica* (Aquinas 1997a; 1997b).

³⁰ The Pseudo-Dionysius uses the word 'analogy' twice in this passage, and the meaning of the term here calls for some explanation in *The Divine Names*:

... the divine is revealed according to the analogy (ἀναλογία) of each intellect ... (1987, 48-49 [588A])

... the Good ... which alone and of itself is established beyond being, makes a ray of light fittingly appear for the analogical (ἀναλόγοις ἐλλάμψεσιν) illumination of each being ... (1987, 49 [588C]).

What is the meaning of analogy in such a context? It is clear that it is being used in an ontological sense, but that at the same time it has an epistemological value. It takes us back to the very origin of the concept, as established by Clement of Alexandria in Christian philosophy at least, for whom the analogy of being was the primary meaning. Analogy is originally a mode of being, a proportion of beings in relation to each other. The proportionality of beings makes possible the knowledge which is based on comparison, and leads to what is known as the *via analogiae*, an epistemological tool in Neoplatonism and Christian philosophy, and in scholastic thought subsequently. The Pseudo-Dionysius here envisages that each being will have its own relationship to the Good, its own proportion, and a share of knowledge which is appropriate to that. The illumination received will be directly proportionate to the ratio of being to the Good. It is because the Pseudo-Dionysius is not here stressing epistemology, or a form of knowledge which is intellectual and discursive, that the concept of analogy is given such an ontological bias: he wants to maintain that this kind of knowing is itself a form of being.

become more divine (after '*deiformis*'). In this regard the Pseudo-Dionysius is, for a negative theologian, surprisingly positive about language. Names are real, true and their origin goes back to the True, the Real itself, that is, to God from whom they flow and to whom they return.

How does this view of language relate to the negative theology that the Pseudo-Dionysius represents? An explanation of this can be found in his *Mystical Theology*. The *via negativa* reaffirms a nescience, and it is a way that ends in "mystical silence" and a "not-knowing" (Mortley 1986, 231). This form of knowing – that is, knowing as not-knowing – is a "higher and more original form of knowing", as for Damascius (ibid.). For example, the Pseudo-Dionysius denies that Christ was human but this does not mean that Christ was not a person. What he wants to show with this language is that Christ was 'super'-human. Furthermore, he contends, God lives in the dark. Through the working of divine darkness, forms that for us in normal reality are oppositions are no longer opposites. For, according to the Pseudo-Dionysius, that darkness existed long before these oppositions. Whoever is on the other side of the light, whoever is divine darkness, sees by not seeing, knows by not knowing. And, following this branch of negative theology, we must pray to be allowed to see and to know in this way. We can only know what cannot be known in veiled form, through what is knowable to all beings. Divine light veils, conceals, shows nothing. The Pseudo-Dionysius thus reverses Plato's images that were so influential in later Greek metaphysical – and even Christian – thinking.

By continuing Plotinus' Neoplatonism, Dionysian thinking – like that of Damascius – reaches a moment when the dualism of light and darkness collapses and light becomes the symbol of darkness. Did the Pseudo-Dionysius deny the existence of a personified object of love and adoration? Is God in mystical union still an object of faith, a 'something else'? The literature generally maintains that for the Pseudo-Dionysius God remains a Person, but the more God's unknowableness is emphasised, the closer people come to the point where God, being a Person, must be thought of in a way totally different from the image normally suggested by 'person'. This continued difficulty of thinking God as One and Only can of course be tracked in the work of Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa. It is to Eckhart, however, to whom I shall now briefly turn in order to further foreground some of the *via negativa*'s concerns regarding articulating the identity and presencing of the One and Only God.

Eckhart is another prominent figure in the negative theological tradition in medieval Christianity. It is difficult to reduce Eckhart's diverse and pluralised body of

work to simple positions, but an emphasis on apophysis remains constant throughout his work (see Colledge, McGinn and Smith, eds. 1981; Hart 2000). He takes a range of different and apparently contradictory approaches to discourse on God. God is described, for example, as exceeding all human predicates. He is affirmed as *esse simpliciter* or undifferentiated existence, and he is also said to be beyond all concepts of existence, goodness, and so on. Eckhart was indeed famously accused of heresy in 1329 CE with one of the charges against him related to his radically apophatic claim that we speak as incorrectly when we call God ‘good’ as we do when we call white ‘black’.³¹ Eckhart’s paradoxical argument about God’s being is sharpened by a more uncompromising concept of analogy than is found in Aquinas, the former preferring to posit absolute opposition rather than a relation of proportion or extension between the respective analogates.³² As Eckhart sees this, to argue that God is properly understood as *esse* is to deny that creatures can also possess such a value in themselves. And, by the same token, to attribute the value of *esse* to creatures is to deny that value can be properly applied to God at all. To establish precisely what Eckhart is claiming and not claiming about God, Bernard McGinn argues that his various arguments need to be placed within the larger context of his notion of God as Absolute Unity or *unum* (see Colledge, McGinn and Smith 1981). Absolute unity (*unum*) arguably reconciles the kataphatic and apophatic aspects of Eckhart’s discourse on God because it enables him to posit God as simultaneously transcendent and immanent with respect to his creation. Importantly, Eckhart’s position of reconciliation rests upon his argument that God’s absolutely distinguishing characteristic – namely his absolute unity or one-ness – is nothing other than his inability to be distinguished. Here, then, for Eckhart, is a sense in which God is simultaneously distinct and indistinct with respect to his creation, and, in which, the more distinct he is from humanity, the more indistinct he is from humanity, and *vice versa*. This argument enables Eckhart to reconcile positive and negative

³¹ “That God is neither good, nor better nor best; hence I speak as incorrectly when I call God good as if I were to call white black” (Eckhart in Colledge, McGinn and Smith, eds. 1981, 80). This statement is collected as “The Bull “In agro dominico” (March 27, 1329)” (ibid. 77-81) and whilst there is some doubt as to whether the statement can be ascribed to Eckhart, there are traces of this phrasing in *Sermon* 9 (ibid. 148), and *Sermon* 83 (ibid, 207).

³² See Kretzmann and Stump (1993, 94-106) for their explication of Aquinas’ arguments based on God’s participation, and the uniqueness of the One from Aquinas’ ‘Divine Names’ and ‘On Spiritual Creatures’. ‘Analogates’ refers to a thing, term or concept that is analogised and is a common device drawn on/critiqued in the metaphysics of thought. For example, the idea that the First Being is the prime analogate, or that human beings are the primary analogate for metaphysics.

articulations of God by making it possible for him to argue that God transcends his creation precisely because he is immanent to it.³³

These ideas are particularly significant because they mark another shift with regards to the development of conceptual schemae through which monotheism can be mapped. This shift and associated schemae comes to the fore with the European Enlightenment's focus on scientific rationalism.³⁴ More specifically, the inability of theological discourse to speak constatively about dogmatic, transcendental certainties – given the parameters of what could and could not be uttered under the *via negativa* – and the rise of that particular form of empiricism common to Enlightenment thinkers that insisted that one could only speak of things in this world, emphasised the need to totally expunge theological discourse of metaphysical claims. It is to unpacking the development of this new schema that I now turn, a schema which informs not just modernity's struggle to articulate being and ground, but marks a further disruption of the kinds of kataphatic monotheistic claims of God's one-ness discussed in preceding chapters.

The *Via Moderna*: Further Divisions of Reason from Being

Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so I too can hope for great things if I can manage to find just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakeable. (Descartes 1984b, 16)

The work of René Descartes (see, e.g., 1984a; 1984b; 1970) is paradigmatic for what I am calling the *via moderna*. Seeking the axioms from which all knowledge can be deduced, Descartes concluded that these will not be the foundation of a new epistemology and will uncover the basis of Being in the clear way that ancient and medieval metaphysicians had long sought through their conceptions of substance. During this search, however, human reason discovers that all the certainties that it had tried to formulate are doubtful (see, e.g., Descartes 1984b, 12-36; 1984a, 194-195). The senses can deceive; reason can err; ideas can be no more than images or re-presentations of reality. Even God and his existence are doubted (although Descartes tries to lay this

³³ See Heidegger's critique of Eckhart's 'fundamental conception' and his criticism of Eckhart's irrationality in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (2004b, 239-241). For Eckhart's discussion of *esse est Deus*, see his *Prologues to the Opus tripartitum* (1974).

³⁴ Some implications of this growing focus on scientific rationalism have already been considered in the context of biblical interpretation in my Chapter Two.

doubt to rest through recognition of the disparity between the power of human reason and God's inherent capacity).³⁵ The thinking 'ego', it appears, must doubt;³⁶ indeed, for Descartes, thinking *is* doubting, and the first basic principle of reason – and its only certainty – must be to doubt everything that can reasonably be doubted. Only through the engagement of such doubt can certainty be established. In Descartes' words, if any conviction "is so firm that it is impossible for us ever to have any reason for doubting what we are convinced of, then there are no further questions for us to ask: we have everything that we could reasonably want" (1984b, 103). And yet, "precisely because of their eagerness to find the truth, people who do not know the right method of finding it often pass judgement on things of which they lack perception, and this is why they fall into error" (1984a, 206-207). The engagement of doubt, then, as Descartes stresses, is not a "flippant or ill-considered conclusion, but is based on powerful and well thought-out reasons" (1984b, 15).

That reason is able to doubt so comprehensively – being now autonomous from any other supporting ground or Being than its own certainty-in-doubt – makes it, for Descartes, the supporting substance of all Being. That is, it is through doubting that reason surpasses and grounds the experienced reality (with all its disorder and defective 'certainties'). Indeed, even as Descartes maintains a dualism between the thinking ego (the *res cogitans*) and another substance, the reality outside the ego (the *res extensia*), the *res extensia* is subjected to reason, is derived from it, and is literally an extension of it. The ultimate foundation, it is now argued, is no longer in Being itself, but in reason.³⁷ Here Descartes breaks with a static essentialism – the belief that the ultimate ground, the deepest essence, lies in Being – and rigorously pleads for a dynamic essentialism:

³⁵ Descartes puts this in a way reminiscent of thinkers of the *via negativa*: "But I do not think that we should ever say of anything that it cannot be brought about by God. For since everything involved in truth and goodness depends on His omnipotence, I would not dare say that God cannot make a mountain without a valley, or that one and two should not be three. I merely say that He has given me such a mind that I cannot conceive a mountain without a valley, or an aggregate of one and two which is not three, and that such things involves a contradiction in my conception" (Descartes 1970, 15). In effect, though, because Descartes would rather base his theological claims upon a metaphysic than support a metaphysic upon theological dogma, he is a modern not a scholastic thinker.

³⁶ Andrea Christofidou calls this doubt "methodic scrutiny" and sees it as integral to Descartes' aims of removing the taints of dogmatism and human fallibility, of building a new metaphysics, and investigating the "possibility of of the nature of reality being open to reason" (2013, 13, 14).

³⁷ Darren Hynes indeed argues that "principles of reasoning never themselves fall prey to doubt; Descartes doubts only the objects of his understanding, not the understanding itself" (2010, 7). Kenneth Seeskin argues conversely that Descartes' position with regards to human reason, doubt and God leads "to incoherence" (2017, 54). That is, he suggests that because Descartes further strengthens the recognition from the *via negativa* that human "thought has no purchase on God" (55), there can only be incoherence. As Seeskin puts this, "it is as if having shown through rational arguments that God exists, we come to see that his existence may render those very arguments invalid" (54).

the belief that the ultimate ground lies in the methodical search for an ultimate ground, and thus in the dynamism of reason.³⁸

Reason's certainty-in-doubt, then, the pivot of the Cartesian system, clearly problematises monotheistic formulations, whether apophatic or kataphatic. In particular, given its starting point can only be from human reason – and because cognition also does not require leaving the grounds of *res cogitans* (see, e.g., Descartes 1984b, 74-75) – Descartes' methodic scrutiny can only problematise such concepts as 'transcendence', 'infinity', and 'God'. After all, how can God be both an idea of reason and precede reason? How can (human) reason's doubt be the only foundation for certainty, and still refer to and rely upon a higher certainty in God? The problem, in other words, is that reason cannot support everything all at once, and still ultimately be supported by something else.

The foundation in thinking that Descartes seeks is arguably a foundation without foundation, such that reason is left with nothing but its own method of scrutiny. To put this otherwise, Descartes' goal might be certainty but "his lot is doubt" (Watson 1987, 203). Although these views have been contentious,³⁹ what is clear is that Descartes' arguments informed a break with pre-modern theological and philosophical presuppositions about Being, facilitating the view that not even reason can speak about transcendence.⁴⁰ The understanding of the limits of human reason which informed the *via negativa* is, then, re-framed throughout the *via moderna*, a re-framing that is further

³⁸ Bryan Jay Wolf argues that Descartes' process "shifts the philosophical enterprise away from its theological moorings toward something that we might recognize today as 'negative dialectics'" (2001, 105). This refocus from an ontological referent to how thinking occurs, whilst still foregrounding recognition of the limits of human understanding, is the shift I have also described as that from the *via negativa* to the *via moderna*.

³⁹ Descartes' views were highly contentious in his own time, as evidenced by the ongoing discussions he held with various interlocutors (see, e.g., Descartes 1984b, 66-397 [Objections and Replies]). Later thinkers also took up these contentions. For example, John Locke and after him David Hume also expressed, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a scepticism regarding Descartes' attempts to make reason the last metaphysical foundation. Foregrounding empirical limits to the work of human reason, they considered any metaphysical system unreliable because it creates its own axioms and uses them as a basis for endless speculation. Locke and Hume do not deny that there are 'things behind things', but rather stress that of them people can know nothing.

⁴⁰ For Hume, "the justest and most plausible objection against a considerable part of metaphysics; ... [is] ... that they are not properly a science, but arise either from the fruitless efforts of human vanity, which would penetrate into subjects utterly inaccessible to the understanding; or from the craft of popular superstitions, which, being unable to defend themselves on fair ground, raise these entangling brambles to cover and protect their weakness" (Hume 2010, 8). On the traditional view, we represent things as substances. Aristotle, for example, said that the individual human being is a substance, whose essence is to be a rational animal. In his turn, Descartes said that he is a thinking substance, and that physical objects are extended substances. So the notion, under this kind of model of thinking, is that substances are the primary beings, and that they have properties (sometimes called qualities or modes), such as thinking or extension. Hume, however, abandoned this traditional view. In his view, when we examine our idea of an individual thing, all we find is the simple ideas which go together to make a complex idea. And with this, he further redirected the attention of modern philosophy away from substances and their properties, and toward relations.

exemplified in the critical work of Immanuel Kant. Kant, for instance, restored the multiplicity of Being, but not, as in pre-modern biblical or theological thinking, by distinguishing between two ‘worlds’, a divine and a human, which more or less complemented one another. Rather Kant points to a *break* between what he identifies as a ‘phenomenal’ and a ‘noumenal’ reality.⁴¹ On one side, the *Vernunft* (reason), with its faculty of knowing, relates to the world of appearances. On the other side, this phenomenal world repeatedly withdraws when our knowledge appears to encompass it in a successful process of knowing and science; on this border there ‘appears’ a noumenal world that remains unknowable for reason. As he describes this, “About these appearances, further, much may be said a priori that concerns their form but nothing whatsoever about the things in themselves that may ground them” (Kant 2005, A49/B66), and, later:

We can understand nothing except what brings with it something in intuition corresponding to our words. When we complain that we do not see into the inner nature of things, this can mean no more than that we cannot grasp, through pure reason, what the things that appear to us might be in themselves ... Observation and division with respect to the appearances take us into the interior of nature, and we cannot say how far this will proceed. But every transcendental question that takes us beyond nature can never be answered. (Kant 2005, A277f/B333f)

According to Kant’s framework, then, people can touch this world of the noumena by thinking it, representing it, or experiencing it, but they cannot know or understand it. Indeed, under this view, to even perceive an object is to conceptualize experience in a certain way. This means that objects can never be perceived

⁴¹ This is Kant’s important distinction between *phenomena* (the appearance of things to us) and *noumena* (things-in-themselves). Throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant stresses that all that we are ever dealing with are appearances – that we operate on the level of phenomena. In a line similar to the operation of the *via negativa*, ‘things-in-themselves’ or what he calls ‘noumena’ – which are the causes of our sensations and of the appearance of things – are themselves unknowable because they are beyond us. Human knowledge is thus restricted to knowledge of phenomena. As Kant writes, “we can have no knowledge of an object, as a thing in itself, but only as an object of sensible intuition, that is, as appearance” (Kant 2005, Bxxiv). A consequence of Kant’s theory of phenomena and noumena, is that the world we know and live in is the phenomenal world that our own minds organise and synthesise from the multiplicity of data. For instance, note that under Kant’s theory space and time are subjective, that is, they are part of our apparatus of perception. And just because of this, we can be sure that everything we experience will be experienced in terms of space and time. One significant problem for any kataphatic theological (re)turn is that since we always approach ‘things’ through the forms of Space and Time we can never have an ‘experience’ of things outside of those structures. Under the Kantian schema, therefore, we never have an ‘experience’ of things as they are ‘in themselves’. All attributions of meaning are therefore restricted to our experiential constructs, and, as the *via negativa* stresses, to say that God in itself (that God as independent of my perception of it) exists spatially is to make an invalid assertion. As Kant stresses: “nothing must be attributed to the object but what the thinking subject derives from itself” (ibid., Bxxi). This, of course, poses problems for both kataphatic and apophatic theological claims.

independently of our conceptualizations; we can only consider objects as they appear to us. The result is a type of internalism: all thought and talk about the world is internal to our conceptual scheme (Lynch 1998. 11). To put this otherwise, Kant's *via moderna* deepens the gap between human reason and the world (and Being). Not only does he make the objective and the subjective distinctions within human conceptualization and experience, but what is outside of experience is nothing conceivable, it is not even objective. And yet, despite this division, the noumena force their way into every 'successful' relationship between subject and object, causing the process of knowing to reach an impasse. This noumenal world is the break in the subject-object schema taken for granted before Kant. Things can be known insofar as they appear to people, but this knowledge remains limited; 'things-in-themselves' will always escape knowledge. At this point, however, where the certainty of knowledge is at risk, this hidden world is still an issue. The unobservable and unthinkable thus enter the human knowledge of reality as soon as people try to penetrate this reality (Bulhof & ten Kate 2000, 39). As Kant reminds us,

Now, although we must say of the transcendental conceptions of reason, 'they are only ideas', we must not, on this account, look upon them as superfluous and nugatory. For although no object can be determined by them, they can be of great utility, unobserved and at the basis of the edifice of the understanding, as the canon for its extended and self-consistent exercise – a canon which, indeed, does not enable it to cognize more in an object than it would cognize by the help of its own conceptions, but which guides it more securely in its cognition. (Kant 2005, 227)

What is clear is that, under this framework, the 'what' of God remains hidden to reason, just as the 'what' of Being does. Even the 'that' of God and Being remains unknowable on the basis of the appearances through which the world makes itself known:

For all negations – and they are the only predicates by means of which all other things can be distinguished from the *ens realissimum* – are mere limitations of a greater and a higher – nay, the highest reality; and they consequently presuppose this reality, and are, as regards their content, derived from it ... The object of the ideal of reason – an object existing only in reason itself – is also termed the primal being (*ens originarium*); as having no existence superior to him, the supreme being (*ens summum*); and as being the condition of all other beings, which rank under it, the being of all beings (*ens entium*). But none of these terms indicate the objective relation of an actually existing object to other things, but

merely that of an idea to conceptions; and all our investigations into this subject still leave us in perfect uncertainty with regard to the existence of this being. (Kant 2005, 233)

The conception of such a being is the conception of God in its transcendental sense, and thus the ideal of pure reason is the object-matter of a transcendental theology ... by such an employment of the transcendental idea, we should be overstepping the limits of its validity and purpose. For reason placed it, as the conception of all reality, at the basis of the complete determination of things, without requiring that this conception be regarded as the conception of an objective existence. (ibid., 234)

The impact of these points is that reason is essentially broken, finding its purpose only in a sensitivity to the corresponding break in Being that ruptures its ability to know and that challenges it to halt before its own limits. The *via moderna* can neither prove nor disprove the reality of transcendental ideas, and the Kantian critique of pure reason can only wind up with a negative result. The upshot is that while knowledge of such as God cannot be expanded but only regulated, such a conception of reason also prompts the viewing of everything *as if* God, the soul, and the world existed. Furthermore, Kant argues that practical reason does allow acceptance of these ideas,⁴² and that they are in fact necessary for our practical conceptions as a warranty of moral order (Kant 1997, 102). Such ideas indeed regulate our knowledge.⁴³ It is via this measure Kant is able to ascribe to God intellect, will, and other attributes, despite his real being remaining hidden. The *via moderna* thus, once again, seems to outline a path reminiscent of the *via negativa*.

⁴² Practical reason knows that these three ideas – God, the soul, and the world, for example – possess objective reality but no more than that. It does not add to the volume of our scientific knowledge. Speculative reason cannot do anything with these ideas except to let them regulate and purify our knowledge, and uses the idea of God to combat and avert anthropomorphism as a source of superstition and fanaticism. When intellect and will are attributed to God, it is merely a ‘practical’ knowledge of God; it is in no sense a speculative one. For a person to abstract the anthropomorphic elements from it is to be left with no more than the word. The concept of God thus does not belong in metaphysics (which is nonexistent) but in ethics. See Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* (1997, 103ff).

⁴³ Kant argues, for instance, in the “Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic” in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (2005) that the idea of God has a positive regulative role in the systematization of empirical knowledge continuous with the general aim of the faculty of reason.

Kierkegaard's Negative Theology

After Kant, in the middle of the nineteenth century, Kierkegaard sharpened the *via moderna* protest against any form of thinking about Being. In doing so, he primarily attacked Hegel's metaphysical system.⁴⁴ The remnants of the *via negativa* resound more loudly and openly in his writings than in Kant's, since he studied radical critics such as Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and Johann Georg Hamann. Where, however, following the *via negativa* line, Hamann posited that the divine can never coincide with the truth of Being, and can only reveal itself 'through reason's lies and contradictions',⁴⁵ Kierkegaard went further, contending that if revelation can be 'thought', then this thinking can only have meaning in a language of absolute irony, paradoxes, and absurdities. God leaves human reason behind in crisis and divisiveness, since in speaking about God human reason must go further than it can go and must therefore surrender (Kierkegaard 1983). Kierkegaard starts with the *experience* of divisiveness, which he describes as constitutively subjective. This experience is a 'lived' knowledge and a unique, personal-existential truth. To reach God, Kierkegaard thinks people must leave all positive knowledge behind and rely solely and radically on this experience. For Kierkegaard, the religious person cannot come to or comprehend God, but can only stand before him "in fear and trembling" (Kierkegaard 1983, 75). Thus Kierkegaard, in his own way, links 'the truth' of (Christian) faith with a philosophical critique of thinking about Being. This makes him an untimely thinker in a period when the separation between theology and philosophy – initiated earlier by Aquinas – had long been taken for granted.

Kierkegaard is thus recognised as a pivotal thinker in what I would call the *via moderna negativa* and its bridging and (as) problematising of pre-modern and postmodern concepts of negation or apophysis. He stresses the disjuncture between human reason and any thought of the divine with his insistence on God as the wholly other whose revelation can only be articulated in a broken language or irony, paradox and fragmentation (Kierkegaard 1983, 113-120; 2000, 93-101). Kierkegaard's thought has indeed been shown to pursue the *via negativa* to its logical limits with its presentation of Christian experience as an absolute surrendering of all positive and

⁴⁴ I engage in greater detail with the discursive formulations and disruptive potential of Hegel's metaphysical system in Chapter Five.

⁴⁵ See Kevin Hart's discussion of Hamann's contribution to negative thinking in *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (2000, 168-69, 222). Original reference is from Johann Georg Hamann (1950, 3.227) "Konoxompax". See also Hamann (1986a) "Letter to Christian Jacob Krauss (18 December 1784)" and (1986b) "Metacritique on the Purim of Reason (1784)".

negative forms of knowledge, as a prostration of itself, in fear and trembling, before God (Law 1994, 221). Indeed, according to David Law, Kierkegaard was “not only a negative theologian, but outdid negative theology” (ibid.). Law’s reason for claiming this of Kierkegaard was that he was “more apophatic” even than negative theology since he did not recognise even the mystical way to God (ibid.). From this perspective, Kierkegaard’s thought – a clear instantiation of the *via moderna* – represents an important forerunner to another thread in my mapping of the genealogy of monotheism, the Heideggerian project of overcoming onto-theology, the subject of Chapter Six.

Negative Theology Returned

So far this chapter has been concerned to trace some of the articulations of the *via negativa*, examining both its precursor in Neoplatonism and core exemplars from Christian medieval and scholastic thought, and its subterranean presence in what I have called the *via moderna*. To return however to Judaic articulations, this time with an aim of noting certain of its explicit engagements of the *via negativa*, is to re-map earlier discussions of God’s re-presentation. As has been traced in earlier chapters, the Hebrew God is defined as the creator of the universe: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen 1:1); similarly, “I am God, I make all things” (Isa 44:24). God, as creator, is thus, by definition, separate from the physical universe, existing beyond space and time, and thus, as noted in the beginning of this chapter, beyond any human capacity (e.g. Moses’) to understand. God is therefore absolutely different from anything else, and, as above, is in consequence held by Judaic thinkers to be totally unknowable. (As earlier discussions have articulated, God can only be appealed to rather than known, and hence predictable.) Under this framework of belief, direct statements about God are impossible.⁴⁶ Eleventh-century Jewish Neoplatonic

⁴⁶ Such a conception is also reflected in the tradition of ‘aniconism’, which refers to the practice or belief of avoiding or shunning the images of divine beings, respected figures or other manifestations. The term ‘aniconic’ is used to describe the absence of graphic representations in a particular belief system, regardless of whether an injunction against them exists. The word itself derives from the Greek εἰκών or ‘image’. With reference to monotheism more broadly, aniconism has a complex literary and historical genealogy that draws on prohibitions on graven images in the *JPS Tanakh* (Ex 20:3-6; Lev 26:1; Num 33:52; Deut 4:16, 27:5; Isa, Jer and Amos; contra Gen 1:26 “let us make man in our image”). Aniconism is patrolled by *Halakha* (Jewish law) as taught by the *Shulchan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law) and is still practiced and applied by Conservative Judaism and Orthodox Judaism today. Despite the semantic association with idols, halakhah interprets these biblical verses as prohibiting the creation of certain types of graven imagery of people (including sculpture), angels, or astronomical bodies, whether or not they are actually used as idols (*Schulchan Arukh*, 1565). Rabbi Joseph Ephraim ben Karo also known as Yosef

philosopher Bahya ben Joseph ibn Pakuda argued, in his *Al Hidayah ila Faraid al-Qulub* (*Guide to the Duties of the Heart*), that the inability to describe God is related to the fact of his absolute unity. God, as the entity which is truly One, must be free of properties and is thus unlike anything else and indescribable (Pakuda 1996). This is a conceptual schema for divine simplicity, an idea that is developed fully in later Jewish philosophy, especially in the thought of the medieval rationalists such as Maimonides (e.g. 1910 [c. 1190]) and Samuel ibn Tibbon.⁴⁷

It is, however, understood in this tradition that although God cannot be described directly it is possible to describe him indirectly via his attributes. The ‘negative attributes’ (תַּאֲרִימֵ שׁוֹלָלִים) relate to God himself, and specifically to what he is *not*. The ‘attributes of action’ (פְּעֻלּוֹתָיו מֵעַד חֲאֲרִים), on the other hand, do not describe God directly, but rather his interaction with creation. Maimonides was perhaps the first Jewish thinker to articulate this doctrine explicitly in his *Dalalāt al-Hairin* (*The Guide of the Perplexed*):⁴⁸

God’s existence is absolute and it includes no composition and we comprehend only the fact that He exists, not His essence. Consequently it is a false assumption to hold that He has any positive attribute ... still less has He accidents, which could be described by an attribute. Hence it is clear that He has

Caro or Qaro, is the author of the sixteenth century code of Jewish law, the *Schulchan Arukh* (ערוך שולחן, *Schulchan Arukh* or ‘Prepared Table’). Caro was of Spanish origin, and though his erudition meant he was conversant with the main works of Ashkenazi scholars of Central and Eastern Europe, he emphasised the Sefardi approach to the halakhah. Together with its commentaries, it is the most widely accepted compilation of Jewish law written. In his commentary on the halakhah, Alan Unterman explains, “the fact that the *Schulchan Arukh*, in its expanded form, contained the decisions of the two leading scholars of Sefardi and Ashkenazi Jewry gave it an acceptability unattained by previous codes. As a single work it became the most authoritative halakhic text, and with the exception of the Yemenite Jews who continued to follow Maimonides’ rulings, it shaped the religious life and practice of every Jewish community. The art of printing, which was introduced in the fifteenth century, was also an important factor in establishing the *Schulchan Arukh* to be disseminated widely and quickly, and to play a not inconsiderable role in its acceptance as the standard halakhic reference work” (Unterman 1981, 124). In a refutation of the belief in an iconic Judaism, and more generally of the underestimation of Jewish visual arts, historian of ideas Kalman Bland recently proposed that the phenomenon of aniconism is a modern construction, and that “Jewish aniconism crystalised simultaneously with the construction of modern Jewish identity” (Bland 2001, 8). Others have noted that the notion of a total prohibition of figural representation in the Biblical and Hellenistic-Roman periods is untenable (Guttmann 1967-1968; 1989, 161-174; Keel and Uehlinger 1998; Edelman 1996b). Additionally, see *Tzimtzum*: the notion that God ‘contracted’ his infinite and indescribable essence in order to allow for a ‘conceptual space’ in which a finite, independent world could exist. Note that, alternatively, the construct of God incorporating all of reality is also offered in some schools in Jewish mysticism. Notably, in the *Tanya* (the Chabad Lubavitch book of wisdom and the main work of Hasidic mysticism), it is stated that to consider anything outside of God is tantamount to idolatry. Chabad thinkers note the paradox that this introduces – how can an entity be a creator of itself – but the resolution is considered outside the realm of human understanding, a movement echoed in Christian mysticism.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, whilst much Jewish theology speaks on the One-ness and indivisibility of God, the idea of divine simplicity is that one should not claim that God is one, or three, or any type of being. As shown, these ideas are also present in Neoplatonic and Christian thinking.

⁴⁸ See also *Tanya Shaar Hayichud V’ehaemunah* (Zalman 1982).

no positive attribute however, the negative attributes are necessary to direct the mind to the truths which we must believe ... When we say of this being, that it exists, we mean that its non-existence is impossible; it is living – it is not dead; ... it is the first – its existence is not due to any cause; it has power, wisdom, and will – it is not feeble or ignorant; He is One – there are not more Gods than one ... Every attribute predicated of God denotes either the quality of an action, or, when the attribute is intended to convey some idea of the Divine Being itself – and not of His actions – the negation of the opposite. (Maimonides 1910, 1:58)

In line with this formulation, attributes commonly used in describing God in rabbinic literature in fact refer to the negative attributes – omniscience, for example, refers to non-ignorance; omnipotence to non-impotence; unity to non-plurality, eternity to non-temporality. Examples of the attributes of action – that is, descriptions of God in interaction with creation – are God as creator, revealer, redeemer, and as mighty and merciful. Similarly, God’s perfection is generally considered an attribute of action. Joseph Albo (1929 [*Sefer ha-Ikkarim (Book of Principles)*, 2:24]) points out that there are a number of attributes that fall under both categories simultaneously. It is also worth noting that the various names of God in Judaism generally correspond to the attributes of action – they represent God as he is known through his interactions. The exceptions are the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), and the closely related “I Am the One I Am” (אֲנִי הָאֵלֶּהּ אֲנִי, *ehyer ašer ehyeh* of Exodus 3:13-14), both of which refer to God in his negative attributes, as absolutely independent and uncreated. Since two approaches are used to speak of God, and indeed to name God, there are times when these may appear in conflict, giving rise to apparent paradoxes in Jewish philosophy. In these cases, although the two kinds of description of the same phenomenon appear contradictory, the difference is merely one of perspective. One description takes the viewpoint of the ‘attributes of action,’ and the other of the ‘negative attributes’.

Conclusion

In concluding Chapter Four’s mapping of the *via negativa*, including its reformulations through the *via moderna*, several points need now to be noted. First, whenever Western theology or metaphysics seek to name ‘God’, they instantiate of necessity a metaphysical concept which fixes the referent and horizon of the divine name. In the history of modern (that is, post-Cartesian) metaphysics, what I have called the *via*

moderna, whenever the meaning of God is determined as the ‘ultimate ground’ – as in the case of Leibniz, as *Causa sui*, as in Descartes and Spinoza, or, finally, as a ‘moral God’ in Kant and Nietzsche – it dictates a certain story of identity, presence and being.⁴⁹ The *via negativa* conversely marks a long tradition of attempting to articulate God without falling into the problems of *kataphatic* theology and metaphysics.

What is clear, however, is that the *via negativa*, whilst explicitly challenging kataphatic claims regarding God and tracing the dimensions of ineffability and unsayability, strengthens monotheistic discourses of presence, unity and place (i.e., the trope, the topos, topology of God). Indeed, a privileging of presence and place determines the *via negativa* in many decisive ways, including through the claim found in mystical texts such as the Pseudo-Dionysius’ *On Mystical Theology* (as well as in Eckhart’s sermons), that while one cannot see or know God face-to-face, one can find access to the divine places where he resides. This motif articulates an ‘atopics’ of God, for if God gives himself to be contemplated in a place, this place – the divine place – is not itself God.

At the same time, the Pseudo-Dionysius’ (1980) works, *The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology*, suggest instances of a fascination and ‘uneasiness’ that have to do first of all with the way in which they continue to promise a vision of intuitive plenitude in spite of – or perhaps thanks to – their emptying of all categories and all modalities of being, including those of the being called highest. As the opening chapters of *The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology* demonstrate, union with God is a

⁴⁹ This list does not, of course, end here and could easily be extended both beyond Nietzsche, and through taking many steps back, well before the beginning of so-called modern metaphysics. The Latin term *causa sui* denotes something which is generated within itself. This concept was central to the works of Baruch Spinoza, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Sigmund Freud, where it relates to the purpose that objects can assign themselves. In Freud’s case, the concept was often used as an immortality vessel, where something could create meaning or continue to create meaning beyond its own life. In traditional Western theism, even though God cannot be created by any other force or being, he cannot be defined self-caused (*causa sui*) or uncaused, because this concept implies the Spinozian pantheistic idea of becoming, which contrasts with the belief of scholastic theology that God is incapable of changing, for example:

The Catholic concept of ... God as absolutely independent and self-existent by nature, and, consequently, all-perfect without any possibility of change from all eternity, is altogether opposed to the pantheistic concept of absolute or pure being [that] evolves, determines, and realizes itself through all time. (Sauvage 1907)

Changing implies development, and since God is to be considered the Absolute Perfection, there is no need to change so-called *actus purus* or aseity (Manoussakis 2006, 439; White 2010, 440; te Velde 2010, 698). Instead, recent process theology – with its insistence that God is in some respects temporal, mutable, and passible, *contra* the classical theological view – inserts this concept among the attributes of God in Christianity. Process theology (or thought) refers to the metaphysical cosmology developed primarily by Alfred North Whitehead (1978) and, somewhat independently and with some significant differences, by Charles Hartshorne (1964). It is a way of understanding reality that emphasises the changes in nature of the universe and that interprets such change as a natural consequence of real and essential freedom, novelty, purpose, and experience.

singular experience that situates itself well beyond any intellectual or sensory synthesis or impression. It is for this reason that the second chapter of *The Mystical Theology* speaks of a mystical darkness, that is to say of an ignorance with respect to the divine that is, paradoxically, also the most elevated and sublime form of knowledge of God. In the third chapter of *The Mystical Theology*, this entering into the mystical darkness is circumscribed as the absence of language and thought.

When for Dionysian thought this ‘beyond’ exceeds the logical antithesis of affirmation and negation, when it, moreover, escapes the very alternative of affirmation and negation – of all positing, on the one hand, and of all privation, on the other – if it can for that reason be neither predicated as either this or that nor be understood as either lacking or negating or denying this or that, then it must be, precisely, the *in-between-of-all-things-present-or-absent* – the *khora* – that singles out its very ‘being’ (see, e.g., Derrida 1992c).⁵⁰ This hyperbolic (function of) being is both *other* and *more* – a being-otherwise as much as an otherwise than being. It can not only be said to break away from our historical or common understanding of the concept of being, but must also be seen as the attempt to stretch, inflate or, perhaps, revisit and reinvest this concept’s – God’s – semantic potential (or, in yet another register, the range of its differential possibilities). Indeed, the Pseudo-Dionysius represents less an unqualified success (in negative theology) and more an important test case for a demonstration of the difficulties involved in realising and sustaining both a thought of unthinkable giving and a radically apophatic or ‘unsayable’ form of language that would correspond to such a thought.

However, when coupled with the *via moderna* – as exemplified by the concerns of Descartes, Kant, and their attempts to divide reason from being – the problematic of the *via negativa*’s struggle to articulate God as One and Only opens into, I suggest, a different kind of negation to the kinds of ineffable speaking and not-knowing already considered. This different kind of negation – and perhaps for the *via negativa*, an unexpected negation – is that of an impasse.⁵¹ Indeed I suggest that the articulations of negative theology, like those of traditional biblical scholarship as considered in Chapter Two, and the texts and traditions engaged with in Chapter Three, have reached an end of sorts in their attempts to articulate (and constrain) God as One and Only. This impasse with the representations of God as offered in various *apophatic* and *kataphatic*

⁵⁰ *Chōra* or *Khōra* (from the Greek χώρα) is a philosophical term described by Plato in *Timeaus* (1997d) as a receptacle, a space, or an interval. It is neither being nor non-being but an interval between in which the forms were originally held.

⁵¹ *Impasse* takes its literary origin from the French *im*, expressing a negation; and of *passer* or ‘to pass’.

strains in both the *via negativa* and, arguably, the *via moderna* presents a situation in which productive sense stalls, and this stalling, this impasse, opens new questions as to just what thinking and comprehending entail.

Can an old tradition like that of the *via negativa* continue to be traced through the *via moderna*? Can the *via moderna*, given its representation of human history as a self-creation, as its own project,⁵² also incorporate a tradition that gnaws on its foundations? Is it possible to see the discursive practices of the *via negativa* described above as offering a break and interruption – even an invasion – into the history of thought of monotheism, and one that late modern and postmodern (and poststructuralist) thinkers and discourses try to trace, hear, and perhaps respond to? These questions are not easy to answer, but the thinkers engaged with later in this dissertation, specifically from Chapter Five onwards, pose them repeatedly and differently. Certainly while contemporary thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, Levinas, Marion, Nancy, Caputo and Hart, each demonstrate a certain rapport with the discursive practices of the *via negativa*, they also wrestle with the problems of inheriting and adopting a tradition that can no longer be presented as simply a copy of the past.⁵³ Insofar as the ‘negative’ seems to have made itself independent of the speaking, even in a reprise of a radical emptying of the concept of God (Eckhart’s ‘God of Nothing’, for instance), these cultural philosophers detect a last denial.

From this perspective, the impasse reached by the *via negativa* is not unlike the impasses reached in the traditional theological and theo-political discourses traced and examined in earlier chapters. The impasse reached concerns a metaphysics of presence which reaches a dead end, a literally finite end. The questions noted earlier, however, suggest possible reformulations of these impasses, articulations beyond – through – their ends. This is an attempt that, as will be shown, will be traced through two divergent pathways, one developed by Hegel, the other by Heidegger. The singularity that opens these pathways, these differing discursive articulations of what I am calling the *via moderna negativa* of monotheism, and the constellations of thinking and

⁵² The projects of the *via moderna* will be further traced in the following chapters. See Chapters Five and Six in particular.

⁵³ By way of example – of not simply copying the past – in his essay “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials” (1992c), Derrida specifically sets out to distinguish his discourse from the main western tradition of negative theology. In this tradition, the transcendence of God is indicated by placing the Divine beyond all knowledge, beyond all description and predication, and, not least, beyond all language. In this apophatic or negative tradition, God may be approached through positive description but by negating attribute, any quality, indeed, anything that might be said of him. Derrida’s essay is undertaken partly in response to an ongoing and aggressive effort on the part of contemporary theologians to save theology not from but, rather, for deconstruction. I return to Derrida’s ‘denials’ as offering productive sites for tracing a path beyond onto-theology in Chapters Seven and Eight.

presencing opened up by them, is, of course, Nietzsche's madman and his diagnosis of the death of God.

Chapter Five

Writing (and) the Dissonance of God(s)

A Genealogy for Presencing?

Although my genealogy for monotheism has so far primarily focused on tracing the limits and patterns of some of the main discursive practices informing and comprising monotheistic claims and interpretations, what is also becoming visible is an additional discursive practice that, inextricable from those already mapped in the preceding chapters, also foregrounds their points of collapse. This can be summed up as the operation of presencing.¹ Understood discursively, presencing – the mode of being present – here refers to what has come to be known as the “metaphysics of presence”, itself a major orientation in western onto-theology (Derrida 1973). More specifically, this refers to the idea that the mode of being present – as opposed to that of being absent – has long been given a privileged status throughout western philosophy and theology, and indeed it has been suggested that virtually all forms of western metaphysics – philosophical and theological, including those of the *via negativa* discussed in the previous chapter – are variants of a metaphysics of presence (Garrison, 1999). In Heidegger’s words, this discursive practice has required that “Beings, which show themselves in and for this making present ... are accordingly interpreted with regard to the present; that is to say, they are conceived as presence” (2010a, 24-25). This favoured grasping of beings – and Being – in terms of their presence has also meant that presence has operated as a guarantor for meaning (and, thus, for canon and community, as discussed previously).

In the previous chapters, each of which has traced the eventalisation and genealogy of one of monotheism’s core discursive practices, the discourse of presencing has also been visible although it has not been explicitly foregrounded in those terms. For example, in Chapter One, the processes of canonisation tend to assume or strategically rely upon a presencing, and then enforce that presence and use it to legitimise its own operations. In Chapter Two the problem of the Bible as history – of

¹ See my note in the Introduction, 22n25.

interpretation – revolves around this problematic of presencing. That is to say, Chapter Two traced some of the dimensions and impacts of the spatio-temporal gap between ‘original’ events, texts and beliefs and contemporary readers, between the Bible and history. As traced in that chapter, purported solutions were to establish some form of continuity between these original events, texts and beliefs and contemporary readers; to make, in other words, these original events coherently present to contemporary readers. Chapter Three continued an exploration of this problematic through tracing, in this instance, the roles and functions of God’s presence – and those of other secular political parties – in biblical claims for monotheism. Chapter Four examined the functions and problematic of God’s presence in accordance with a different discursive practice, tracing in this case the trajectories and practices of presencing emblematic of the *via negativa* and some of their reformulations through the *via moderna*. Indeed that chapter very explicitly traced the problematic of presence through its elaboration of the relations considered by onto-theology to hold between presence, conception and meaning. What these chapters have also highlighted through these discussions, however, is the broader discursive problematic of presencing: that presencing as an ordering of reality and an according of privilege is always already also indicative of events, sites and practices of absence, exclusion, marginalisation and contestation. Presence, these chapters show, cannot be conceived of without absence and exclusion. As such, each of these chapters, in tracing some of the discursive patterns of presencing throughout their mapping of the limits of various claims for monotheism have also drawn attention to points of excess and disruption, points where the continuity of narratives, interpretations and claims of the One God gives way, exposing multiplicities, absences, and irreconcilable frictions.

Importantly, because a metaphysics of presence has itself been one of the underpinning assumptions for all of the other discursive practices of monotheism traced so far, presencing’s own events, sites and practices of absence and exclusion also mark points of disruption and contestation within monotheism’s own formative discursive practices. These have been noted throughout the previous chapters, each marking a point where claims of One-ness cannot guarantee meaning. But the impasses in presencing foregrounded in both apophatic and kataphatic monotheistic narratives in the preceding chapters – and to be explored further in this chapter – have also been identified as importantly generative. That is, they mark the development of new discursive articulations and practices for what I am calling monotheism’s *via moderna negativa*, articulations and practices foregrounded by the radical death of God theology inspired by Nietzsche’s madman and the focus of this and the following chapter. More

specifically, this chapter traces the *via moderna negativa* into the Nietzschean death of God eventalisation, further mapping its interjections into Hegel's articulations of God (and the self-presencing of subjectivity), while the following chapter traces the divergent pathways opened up for monotheism and presencing work by Heidegger's concept of ontological difference and his challenges to the metaphysics of presence. Both chapters, as such, map different dimensions of the events and practices comprising and destabilising the entwinement of monotheism with presencing in the *via moderna negativa*. Nietzsche's madman, as noted, marks an event or singularity generative of these eventalisations.

'Is God Dead?'

In religion's perpetual agony lies its philosophical and theoretical relevance. As it dies an ever more secure and serial death, it is increasingly certain to come back to life, in its present guise or in another. (de Vries 1999, 3)

On April 8, 1966, the cover of *Time* asked, 'Is God Dead?' When published, it was the best-selling issue in the magazine's history.² It announced to the public a theological movement that was making its way into the mainstream – namely, radical death of God theology. As with all the events and discourses detailed in preceding chapters, this theological movement was a collection of various disparate voices and perspectives. It ranged, for example, from the cultural theologians grappling with what they termed the post-Christian era (e.g. Vahanian 1961), to the largely Jewish effort at developing a post-Holocaust theology (e.g. Rubenstein 1966), to the metaphysical death of God theology of Thomas J. J. Altizer (1966). What they all shared in common was a collective sense that western culture in general, and the Judeo-Christian tradition in particular, had entered a profound ideological crisis.³ Either religious language had lost

² The cover consisted solely of the question "Is God Dead?" in red letters on a black background without an accompanying image, and became a recognisable visual phenomenon. Homage to the *Time* cover can be seen popular publications such as in *Philosophy Now* (April/May 2010) with the extended question "Is God *really* Dead?" which follows the same visual cues from *Time* and in western popular culture such as the Canadian-American supernatural Western horror television series *Wynonna Earp* in which a nun exclaims "My boss was killed" and Wynonna retorts with "God really is dead" ("Whisky Lullaby" 2017). The recirculation of the question and the importance of asking this question again and in new ways, has clearly struck a chord.

³ Richard Fenn describes this ideological crisis as follows: "The emergence of the radical death of God theology, therefore, is set within a cultural context of ideological crisis: in the absence of universals, of world-views and value-orientations, of sanctions for social arrangements, and of prototypes for individual

its meanings or, even worse, inherited meanings had grown ‘perverse’ in the wake of a long list of modern atrocities. World wars, genocides, nuclear armaments, and the cold war standoff between the East and the West – together these twentieth-century realities turned the optimism associated with the *via moderna* to a deep and lasting pessimism. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have written:

Modern negativity is located not in any transcendent realm but in the hard reality before us: the fields of patriotic battles in the First and Second World Wars, from the killing fields at Verdun to the Nazi furnaces and the swift annihilation of thousands in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the carpet bombing of Vietnam and Cambodia, the massacres from Setif and Soweto to Sabra and Shatila, and the list goes on and on. There is no Job who can sustain such suffering! (Hardt and Negri 2000, 46)

Those who spoke of the death of God, therefore, were attempting to locate themselves within this ‘hard reality before us’ and, perhaps, like the book of Job from the Hebrew Bible, they were asking a question of theodicy about the meaning of suffering and the reasons for God’s apparent silence⁴ in the midst of it all. They were acknowledging that canonical moral and theological platitudes had fallen short and admitting that the Bible’s answer of vicarious suffering is perhaps inadequate in the face of the twentieth-century’s experience of genocide and the potential for nuclear annihilation.

Although the preoccupation of contemporary theology no longer centres on the death of God, this radical theological movement still has relevance today, particularly when we take into consideration the renewed interest in the nexus between theology and philosophy. This radical theology signifies a moment of transition and crisis within western religious consciousness, and indeed helps to establish the discourse that would develop into postmodern theology. Carl Raschke (1982) and Mark C. Taylor (1987) have both suggested a direct link between this death of God thinking and postmodern deconstructive philosophies. As Mark C. Taylor writes in *Erring*, “*deconstruction is the*

motivations, the new theology requires an empirical fit and significance far broader than its sources in academic theology would suggest” (1968, 171).

⁴ Theodicy here refers to an attempt to resolve the evidential problem of evil by reconciling the traditional divine characteristics ascribed to God (omnibenevolence, omnipotence, and omniscience) with the occurrence of evil or suffering in the world. For an overview of the Jewish concept of *tsimtsum* or the self-limitation of God out of love, see Maureen Fritz (1985) “A Midrash: The Self-Limitation of God”. A number of scholars have criticised attempts to uphold theodicy. Emmanuel Levinas, for instance, declared theodicy to be “blasphemous”, arguing that it is the “source of all immorality”, and demanded that the project of theodicy be ended (1988, 156-67).

'hermeneutic' of the death of God' (1987, 6, original italics).⁵ In addition, the death of God theologies came to be associated with a certain spirit of the secularism that permeates most facets of contemporary western society. Of course, long before theologians explicitly took up this thematic of the death of God in the 1960s, philosophers, historians, novelists, and cultural observers had already made this connection between the collapse of Christendom and the beginning of a new, more secular culture.⁶

Given the relatively new found lack of confidence in a metaphysical God, and given that its meaning has been considered either lost or perverted – following the reaction of traditional theology to the question ‘is God dead?’ – retracing some of the instantiations of thinking ‘God is dead’ will be useful for considering the “theological prejudices” alive in the western tradition, even when it professes to be atheist (Derrida 1997a, 323n.3). It is fitting that Nietzsche’s madman heralds this discussion, with the aim of this chapter being to bring more clearly into view a) the multiple impasses in the thinking of ‘God as centre’ that have been outlined in various formulations in the preceding chapters, and b) the ongoing struggle to escape a/the western metaphysics of presence.⁷

As will also be shown, the eventalisation of Nietzsche’s madman generates two different pathways for such work. The first pathway to be explored is that set out by the work of Hegel, specifically in his attempt to reconfigure God away from the transcendental realm favoured by much of the previous western tradition of philosophy and theology (and detailed in the preceding chapters). The second pathway, to be taken in the following chapter and concerning the loss of ‘God as centre’, is walked by Heidegger. Heidegger’s thinking around onto-theology and his overall critique of the metaphysics of presence offer productive suggestions for how traditional conceptions of God might be destabilised and ‘God as centre’ thinking moved beyond. These two pathways mark significant discourses for modern European philosophy as well as theology’s engagement with thinking ‘God’ (and the self-present ‘subject’), and they

⁵ In making this claim, Mark C. Taylor is echoing a claim first made by Carl Raschke in *Deconstruction and Theology* (1982). Interestingly, after Taylor makes his claim about deconstruction as the death of God, he later claims that deconstruction is “a hermeneutic of the desire for God” (M. Taylor 1987, 6).

⁶ It is beyond the scope of this work to deal in a meaningful way with issues of secularism. See Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen and Craig Calhoun’s (2010) edited collection *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, and Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntwerpen’s (2011) edited collection *Rethinking Secularism*. For another analysis of the impact of secularism, see Charles Taylor’s (2004) *Modern Social Imaginaries*.

⁷ The way in which presence regulates aspects of experience and/or existence will be explored in further detail in Chapters Six and Seven.

have profound implications for our understanding of a range of crucial signifiers which will be drawn upon later in the dissertation.⁸

Nietzsche's Death of God

In 1882 Nietzsche published a parable that became famous after his death. He depicted a madman who leaps about the marketplace proclaiming the death of God to astonished onlookers. This madman enters the public arena, lights a lamp in full daylight and calls out "I seek God!" (Nietzsche 1977, 95). Recognising the futility of his search, the madman then announces that God is dead and that modern humanity has killed him. The madman shouts that this murder is the greatest deed ever done, but that it puts the doer⁹ of the deed in a difficult position: "What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? ... Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" (ibid.). For Nietzsche, the death of God was not merely the symbol of an historical and cultural stage at which humanity has finally liberated itself from religious ties and theological dogma, leaving it free to take control of history, but rather that this initiated an experience – a singularity or event – that continues to haunt modernity.¹⁰ Although Nietzsche's parable has influenced twentieth-century philosophy, theology, and literature, it by no means confirms a new era of worldwide atheism. According to Nietzsche's analysis, the self-elevation of humanity and of human reason *requires* that God be sacrificed. But sacrificed to what? As Nietzsche writes four years later, "[d]id one not have to sacrifice God himself, and, out of cruelty against oneself, worship stone, stupidity, gravity, fate, nothingness? To sacrifice God for nothingness – this paradoxical

⁸ For example, 'incommensurability', 'otherness', 'alterity', 'singularity', '*différance*', and 'plurality' – these signifiers reverberate through much of twentieth-century philosophical and theological thought, and will be examined in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

⁹ The reference to the 'doer' is Nietzsche's well-known criticism of subjectivity, wherein he argues that subjectivity – and our consciousness – as something unique to us is just the product of a series of non-human and competing drives: "[J]ust as the popular mind separates lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an *action*, for the operation of a subject called lightening, so popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was *free* to express strength or not to do so. But there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; the 'doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything" (Nietzsche 2007, I:13). Under this trope of thinking, whatever subjectivity we imagine we possess (or project onto, say, gods and goddesses), is at best a fictional becoming. The undermining of the Cartesian idea that consciousness constitutes or underlies the unity of an organism or subject is demonstrative of the crisis in reason that marked the European Enlightenment. If there can be no unity of subject then claims to continuity, oneness, and identity are thrown into serious question.

¹⁰ Nietzsche himself hints at this with "Do we not feel the breath of empty space?" (Nietzsche 1977, 181-182).

mystery of the ultimate act of cruelty was reserved for the generation which is even now arising” (Nietzsche 1973, 63).

Nietzsche was referring here to a comprehensive analysis of western history in which the place of religion, in the broadest sense of the word, had become radically problematic. Since the modern period began, this development has been gaining speed, but it is by no means limited to the modern period. The death of God touches not only the God of the dogmatic theology of its time – not only the God of Descartes and Hegel, supposedly dissolved in a modern metaphysical system; and not only the God of Judeo-Christian faiths which has been an inalienable factor in much personal, public and intellectual life – but refers to a slowly spreading erosion of the transcendent dimension that has marked many earlier cultures, and that has found its expression in sacrifice. In this oldest of rituals, humanity momentarily surrenders itself to a world it cannot control, yet – and this is the ‘paradoxical mystery’ of which Nietzsche speaks – it is questionable whether modernity really *has* excluded transcendence, and whether instead its remains and traces continue to function.¹¹ If the force of Nietzsche’s dictum ‘God is dead’ is less an observation than an evocation, if these three words do not refer to a *fait accompli*, a “definitive knowing or stable position” (Blanchot 1993, 143-148), but to an experience that guides but also disrupts modernity, what kind of experience might this be? It is the experience in which the word ‘God’, however often it may be used or misused, has become a strange and ‘meaningless’ word. This experience marks the moment in which people hardly know any more what they are doing when they pronounce this word, when they speak about or to God. So conceived, the idea of God – whether ‘God’ is associated with the name of a concrete identity, with a characteristic or idea (perfection, divinity), a presence, or only with a vague higher power – is no longer meaningful as a signifier; it remains ‘empty’ and seems to have become superfluous.

While many would first hear the proclamation of God’s death in the cry of Nietzsche’s madman or in Zarathustra’s parody of Christ and Socrates, a conceptually developed ‘death of God’ appears earlier as a central element in the thought of G. W. F. Hegel, who traces the significance of the death of God to its theological or – for Hegel’s Christian framework – its Christological and Trinitarian ground. The ‘death of God’ indeed comes to its first, full philosophical expression in the thinker who has been understood as bringing the Western metaphysics of presence, or onto-theology, to its highest positive completion. Such a completion of metaphysics goes hand in hand with,

¹¹ This is of course an important question for post-foundational thinkers, and will be considered in subsequent chapters. See, in particular, Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

as I will show in this chapter, death of God thinking, each implying an attempt to overcome both the finitude of death and its correlative: the representational form of thought and language that defines the problematic logic of the One and Only God. Because my discussion as a whole is concerned to map the difficulties encountered with thinking God as we have thus far – as evidenced in particular by the *via negativa*'s tenuous grip on the divine in the preceding chapter – it is worth turning to examine in closer detail Hegel's (and, later, Heidegger's) discursive practices in attempting to disclose and disrupt the metaphysics of presence.

Mapping Hegel's *Geist*: Philosophy is Theology

Hegel frequently states that God is the true subject matter of philosophy. In his manuscript for the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Volume 1, he writes that "God is the one and only object of philosophy" and that "philosophy *is* theology" (1984, 84 [*Phil of Religion* I, 3, 4]).¹² In a famous passage from *The Science of Logic* he states that logic "is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought."¹³ This realm is truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature. It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite Spirit" (Hegel 1969, 50 [*Logic*, Intro.]). Finally, Hegel also declares that both philosophy and religion hold that "*God* and God *alone* is the truth" (1991b, 24 [*Encyclopaedia*, §1]). Quite clearly, then, Hegel subscribes to a 'God as Centre' thinking, and yet Hegel's idea of God is different from that of previous philosophical and theological conceptions, and the purported presence and place of God proves to be both complex and controversial in his philosophy.

Hegel's thought is important to my dissertation because it explicitly explores the idea of the 'limit' – the limit of what may be thought – in terms of his accounts of 'determinate being' (*Dasein*), the 'ought', and the 'infinite'. Each will be drawn upon briefly but I am here most concerned with the possibilities for thinking the limit (and beyond) that Hegel's work initiates, and less so with his concept of God thinking

¹² The charge that philosophy is theology will be revisited further in this chapter via Caputo's (2007a) criticism of Hegel's 'ecumenical philosophy'.

¹³ Hegel's 'logic' may be summarised briefly as an ontology that incorporates the traditional notion of Aristotelian syllogism as a sub-component rather than a base. For Hegel, reality is shaped though and through by the mind and, when properly understood, *is* mind. Thus, ultimately, the structures of thought and reality, subject and object are identical. And since, for Hegel, the underlying structure of all reality is ultimately rational, logic is not merely about reasoning or argument but rather is also the rational, structural core of all reality and every dimension of it.

(although his concept of God thinking necessarily has bearing upon his systematic conceptual scheme of the divine). In engaging here with the limit, I disagree with some readings of Hegel's work, which seem to suggest he is *constructing* the Absolute out of an abstract being (this is Kierkegaard's (2000) critique, for example), and instead will argue that he explicates the *structure* (function) of the Absolute as Rational (logical). Hegel's intention, so conceived, appears to be to articulate a Logic of the Absolute, which is epistemological in nature because it is self-reflective. To begin with, under this reading, Hegel rejects the traditional idea that God transcends the world, holding instead that nature is part of the being of God, and that God is truly actualised or realised in the world only through human consciousness. Furthermore, and more importantly for this dissertation, because Hegel holds that history is the story of the development of human consciousness, he also claims that in a sense God himself develops over the course of time. Hegel thus replaces the canonical theological concept of God as existing apart from creation, perfect and complete, with one which claims that God only truly becomes God through creation.

To fully understand what God means for Hegel, we must begin with his logic, which is essentially an attempt to articulate the formal structure of reality itself. Far from marking a mere catalogue of concepts like Kant's *Categories* of the Understanding, logic is a systematic whole in which each element is what it is in relation to all the others, and all are necessary elements in the whole. Logic culminates in 'Absolute Idea', which is understood to 'contain' all the preceding categories as, in effect, its definition. Containing all fundamental determinations within itself, Absolute Idea is related to nothing else, only to itself.¹⁴ It is the erasing of all distinctions. It is the idea of idea, and Hegel speaks of Absolute Idea as "the Idea that thinks itself" (Hegel 1991b, 303 [*Encyclopedia*, §236]). He also explicitly likens it to Aristotle's concept of God when he writes: "This is the *noésis noéseós* [thought thinking itself] which was already called the highest form of the Idea by Aristotle" (ibid.). Hegel further attempts to demonstrate that everything is only intelligible as an expression or concretisation of

¹⁴ 'The Absolute' (*das Absolute*) is Hegel's technical term for the subject matter of philosophy. He writes in *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy* that the task of philosophy is to know the absolute (1977c, 93 [*Difference* II, 25]). He seems to regard 'God' as a synonym, or more popular religious expression for the same (see, e.g., Hegel 1991b, 36, 272 [*Encyclopaedia*, §12, §194]). In the 1824 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, for example, he explains that God and the absolute have the same content or logical meaning, but that God has a more explicit connotation of the absolute having come to its self-awareness (1984, 118-19 [*Phil of Religion* I, 35-36]). Unusually, he uses 'God' in the context of the philosophy of religion. Despite its importance, Hegel is singularly unhelpful in providing an explanation of what he means by the Absolute. Although he said that *logic* could be only a series of definitions of the Absolute (1989, 59 [*Logic*, Intro.]), he never gave a simple working definition of the term.

this Idea. Therefore, he contends that his logic articulates the inner truth latent within the onto-theology of Aristotle (and other philosophers), as well as the understanding of the ordinary person: God (or Idea) is a supreme being, everywhere yet nowhere (immanent and transcendent), from which all other things derive their being.

The Idea of logic is still *merely idea*: it is, in effect, ‘God in himself’, or God implicit. As Idea it is real or objective, but only in the sense that it is not a subjective creation of the human mind. It lacks concretisation in the world. Hegel believes, however, that nature should be understood precisely as Idea concretely expressing or ‘externalising’ itself (and doing so eternally). Higher still than nature, then, is human Spirit and its achievement of self-consciousness, in which the subject reflects on itself as object or, to put it the other way round, the object becomes the subject. Either way, the subject-object distinction is overcome. Thus, Spirit – self-aware humanity – constitutes for Hegel the most adequate, concrete embodiment of the Idea that ‘thinks itself’.¹⁵ In humanity, Idea truly comes to know itself through our philosophical reflection on the logic. This is why he tells us that in the *Science of Logic* we are merely given “the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind” (Hegel 1998b, 176 [*Logic*, §53]). Hegel’s language here must be understood as figurative; however he does not believe that first comes Idea, then nature, then Spirit, holding rather that Idea is eternally ‘embodying itself’ as nature and Spirit.

Another less ‘mystical’ way to put the above is simply to say that Hegel’s logic constitutes a kind of formal ontology which can be used to understand the reason or rational order inherent within reality. Nevertheless, it is almost irresistible to employ a mystical way of speaking in trying to understand Hegel’s conception of God. One reason for this is precisely that his conception has so much in common with how mystics have understood the divine, in both the western and eastern traditions.¹⁶ Like Eckhart, for example, Hegel rejects any firm distinction between the infinite and the finite, or God and the world. Hegel’s argument here is one of his most intriguing: if the infinite stands opposed to (or distinguished from) the finite, then it is *limited* by the finite and cannot be genuinely infinite. The ‘true infinite’ for Hegel can rather only *contain* the finite. To put this in conventional theological terms, God cannot be understood as strictly separate from the world or vice versa. Instead, following Hegel, we must understand God to contain the world, in the sense that the world is a moment

¹⁵ Compare Aristotle’s “Thought thinks itself as object in virtue of its participation in what is thought” (Aristotle 1984a, 4710 [*Metaphysics* Book XIIa.7, 1072^b19]).

¹⁶ For example, Hegel himself defined mysticism simply as an older term for ‘the speculative’ (Hegel 1991b, 133 [*Encyclopaedia*, §82A]).

or aspect of God's being.¹⁷ Hegel's understanding of God has been described as *panentheism*, which translates literally as all-in-God-ism: the belief that the world is within God. God in this sense is not reducible to nature, or to Spirit, insofar as God is also Idea, which transcends any finite being. However, nature and Spirit are, in addition to Idea, necessary moments in the being of God.¹⁸

Hegel is also notorious for having claimed that his philosophy reveals the inner truth of the Holy Trinity of Christianity (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit) – the religion which he claims to be 'absolute'.¹⁹ For Hegel, the Father represents Idea-in-itself, 'prior to creation'. The Father/Idea must 'freely release' himself/itself as otherness. This occurs in nature, and so nature corresponds to the Son, the Idea 'made flesh'. The Holy Spirit, in turn, represents Absolute Spirit, which is humankind come to consciousness of both itself and of nature as an expression of Idea. In Absolute Spirit we 'return to the father'. Because Spirit is one of the moments of God's being, and because it is truly in Spirit that Idea as self-thinking thought is 'actualised', some have wondered if Hegel has not really made man into God. This was what was claimed, for instance, by Ludwig Feuerbach, who insisted that if Hegel had truly understood himself he would have realised that his philosophy leads to this conclusion.²⁰ This is not, however, a coherent understanding of Hegel's philosophy. As noted earlier, Hegel's heterodox theology rejects any firm distinction between God and the world: the world becomes a necessary moment in God's being, with God/Idea understood essentially as a 'process', rather than something static, final and complete. God/Idea continually 'expresses itself' as the world, and one moment in this process is its coming to consciousness of itself through self-aware Spirit. Like all beings, humans are an embodiment of Idea, but because we are self-aware, Idea achieves consciousness of itself through us. Humanity, therefore, is a necessary, consummating moment in the being of God – but still only one moment.

¹⁷ From the perspective of the limit, a something is only a particular something insofar as it is not something else. This means that the something's self-determination is only relative and entirely dependent on what it is not to be what it is. It is thus only temporary, contains its own ceasing-to-be within itself and so is finite, that is, doomed to eventually cease to be (see Hegel 2010b, 343-46 [*Logic*, §§247-249]).

¹⁸ This claim that God requires the world or requires creation goes against the orthodox theologies of all three of the major monotheist faiths in the West (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), which hold that God is absolutely independent of creation and would have lost nothing if he had not created.

¹⁹ Whilst Hegel has been taken up recently in the phenomenological return to theology mentioned in Chapter Four, 145-146n25, particularly by a predominantly Christian set of readings, Caputo has drawn attention to the more anti-Semitic aspects of Hegel's work when he says that "to be reminded of the violence implicit in this schema one need only read Hegel's *Spirit of Christianity*, which manages to say the most hateful things about Jews in the course of defining Christianity as the religion of love" (Caputo 2007a, 80).

²⁰ Feuerbach heartily approved of this and is sometimes cited as one of the founding fathers of 'secular humanism', which holds that there is nothing in the universe that is higher than humanity. See, for instance, Feuerbach's (1854) *The Essence of Christianity*.

God as Absolute Idea – ‘God in himself’ – still exists quite independently of finite human beings.²¹ Without the consummating moment of Absolute Spirit, God/Idea would be ‘incomplete’, but Idea would still express itself in the form of nature.

Hegel’s Metaphysics

The overcoming of the sacred-secular dualism is a unifying factor behind Hegel’s endeavours and can be found throughout his writings from his earliest preoccupation with *Volksreligion* to the theme of Absolute Spirit as totality.²² There are many distinct modalities in Hegel’s explication of this theme. Firstly, it heralds the rising tide of secularisation in Western culture and with it a perceptible decline in the belief in the God of theism in relation to the texture of people’s actual lives. Secondly, congruent with the first development, it signals the ‘progression’ of humanity past the religion of

²¹ For Hegel, the human being is finite because our bodies, like the societies in which we live, come to be and pass away. By contrast, our self-consciousness, what is distinctively human, can become infinite. Because of his endless questioning of tradition, for instance, Socrates is arguably the first “infinite personality” (1991a, 20, 166 [*Phil of Right*, Pref., §138]). Yet as Hegel points out, the meaning of the infinite is ambiguous. According to Hegel, there are two forms of ‘the infinite’: a bad and a good infinite. The bad infinite is “nothing but the negation of the finite” (Hegel 1991b, 149 [*Encyclopaedia*, §94]). The pursuer of the bad infinite experiences dissatisfaction because he undermines the very task he assigns for himself. Absolute negativity may become after a while, Hegel admits, a pointless naysaying. The Sisyphean nature of absolute negativity gets us to the heart of why the bad infinite is bad for Hegel. It is bad because the act of constant negation is a “progress ad infinitum [that] does not go beyond the expression of the contradiction” (ibid.). Hence the negated finite determination “arises again in the same way” to be negated once again, only to rise again and again (ibid.). The absolutely negative ‘I’ can no more achieve its infinite negation than one can count to infinity. One will always remain confronted with an endless series of finite numbers of determinations. One is always on the way to infinity, but never quite makes it. Stuck in the bad infinity, the ‘I’ remains mired in what is finite, forever incomplete. For Hegel, then, this bad infinite is a “spurious infinite” since it remains within the “sphere of the finite” after all (ibid., 149-50).

Hegel ascribes definition of the absolute by the bad infinite in general to the Old Testament worldview, in contrast to other positions in the dialectic of being ascribed to the Greeks. The Greeks held the bad infinite to be unfinished and thus imperfect, while for the Hebrews to escape finitude was an expression of divine perfection. The bad finite beyond the finite must be distinguished from Anaximander’s good infinite which precedes, generates, and cancels any independent finite being. Only the latter was used by the Pre-Socratic Greeks to define the absolute. The former was used only as a transitional concept on the way from the finite to the good infinite, to the unlimited and the limited in composition. The logic of defining the absolute is intercultural, not exclusively Greek. The ‘bad infinite’ is invoked in Hebrew rather than Greek definitions of the absolute. The bad infinite of quality, for example, a shimmering mirage of perfection beyond all finite achievements, is invoked in the Kantian-Fichtean version of an essentially Hebrew definition of the absolute. The bad infinite of measure is also ascribed to the Old Testament, in which God assigns to each finite being its measure, implying that God, the measurer or judge of all things, is beyond measure. (Hegel says that God is the measure of all things, but his explanation shows that he means that God is the measureless measurer).

²² Hegel is mostly concerned with the concretisation of Absolute Idea (read God or *Geist*) particularly with his transition from concept to being in which he ‘reconciles’ (or brings together) immanence and transcendence via his argument for the concretisation of God. He discusses this with regard to the life and death of Christ in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (see Volume 3, β Redemption and Reconciliation: Christ (1985, 122-31 [*Phil of Religion* III, 57-67])).

childhood and adolescence, dominated by the lordship of God and the master-slave relationship it produces. The otherworldliness of this faith leads to a devaluation of this life and therefore obstructs an adequate understanding of nature, self, and history, and with it the achievement of authentic human freedom (that is, what one thinks). Thirdly, it signifies that God, like all else that is true and real (for Hegel), must undergo the process of self-differentiation, diremption (as in to tear apart, or to separate by force), and recovery of self (presence). But this is to move too quickly through Hegel's system. In order to better situate the importance of Hegel's thinking in general, and his usefulness in generating a pathway beyond the impasse of the *via negativa*'s attempt to articulate the logic of the One God, it is necessary to begin again with Hegel's metaphysics.

Hegel accepted the traditional account of metaphysics as the foundational discipline of philosophy. Like Descartes and Aristotle, he saw metaphysics as entwined with epistemology. We cannot pretend to give the specific sciences a foundation independent of metaphysics, Hegel argued, because they presuppose answers to fundamental metaphysical questions. If we attempt to escape these questions, he warned, we really only beg them.²³ Hence Hegel made metaphysics the foundation of his own philosophy. He began the exposition of his system with logic but he saw logic as an essentially metaphysical discipline, whose task is to determine the nature of being in itself, not merely identify formal laws of inference (2010a, 58-66 [*Phil Sciences*, §24]). But if Hegel's metaphysics is important it is also controversial. Probably the most disputed question in Hegel scholarship concerns the status of his metaphysics. Much scholarship has put forward a straightforward metaphysical interpretation of Hegel's thought, stressing the central role religion plays in it. According to this interpretation, Hegel's philosophy was an attempt to justify through reason certain fundamental Christian beliefs, for instance, the existence of God, providence, and the trinity. More recently, however, scholars have advocated other less strictly metaphysical approaches to Hegel's philosophy. They have read it as a theory of categories, a neo-Kantian epistemology, a proto-hermeneutics, a social epistemology, or indeed as an anti-Christian humanism.²⁴ What appears to motivate all these readings is the conviction that if Hegel's philosophy is no more than a traditional metaphysics, it is doomed to

²³ This was an essential aspect of Hegel's critique of empiricism, both in physics and ethics. Empiricism eschewed metaphysics yet presupposed a metaphysics all its own, which it failed to investigate (see, e.g., Hegel 2010a, 79 [*Encyclopedia*, §37]).

²⁴ For the theory of categories interpretation see Hartmann (1972); for a neo-Kantian interpretation see Pippin (1989); for the proto-hermeneutical interpretation see Redding (1996); for social epistemology interpretation see Pinkard (1994); and for the humanist interpretation, see Solomon (1983, 8-9).

obsolescence, given that Kant and many others have shown metaphysics (in this sense) to be a bankrupt enterprise.

What can be made of this shift? Of course, everything depends on the precise sense of ‘metaphysics’, a term with many meanings. The sense in question here is that defined by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* where metaphysics is the attempt to gain knowledge of the unconditioned (i.e. God) through pure reason (2005, B7, 378-88, 395). Kant understands the unconditioned as whatever completes a series of conditions, for instance the final cause, the last unit of analysis, the ultimate subject of predication. He explains that there are three fundamental ideas of metaphysics corresponding to three basic concepts of the unconditioned: God, freedom and immortality (ibid., B 395). It was in this sense that Kant had censured metaphysics in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. If reason attempts to go beyond the limits of experience to know the unconditioned, he argued, it lapses by necessity into all kinds of fallacies: the ‘paralogisms’, ‘amphibolies’ and ‘antinomies’ so ruthlessly exposed in the Transcendental Dialectic. Hence Kant declared that metaphysics, understood as the attempt to know the unconditioned through pure reason, is impossible. This, is, of course, a very similar argument to that put forward in the *via negativa*.

If metaphysics is understood in this sense, it is possible to acknowledge both sides of the shift in the interpretation of Hegel. Strong evidence for the traditional interpretation comes from Hegel’s many statements about the religious purpose and subject matter of philosophy. In *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s Systems of Philosophy*, as noted earlier, he states that the task of philosophy is to know the absolute (1977c, 93 [*Difference* II, 25]). In his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* he declares that the subject matter of philosophy is God and God alone (1991b, 24 [*Encyclopaedia*, §1]). Additionally, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel affirms that philosophy and religion share one and the same object: the absolute or God (1984, 116-117 [*Phil Religion* I, 33]). He even equates philosophy with theology, describing philosophy as a form of worship since it is devoted to a proof of God’s existence and a determination of his nature (ibid., 84). Since Hegel thinks that philosophy attempts to know God through reason, and since he understands God to be infinite or unconditioned, it follows that his philosophy is a metaphysics, and indeed in roughly the Kantian sense, for it attempts to acquire knowledge of the unconditioned through pure reason. It would be incorrect, however, to conclude from these statements that Hegel’s philosophy is a metaphysics in *exactly* the sense proscribed by Kant. Kant saw metaphysics as speculation about *transcendent* entities, as *a priori* reasoning about

objects lying beyond the sphere of experience. In this sense Hegel cannot be a metaphysician at all for a very simple and compelling reason: he denied the existence of the transcendent, the purely noumenal or supernatural. If metaphysics consists in speculation about such a realm, then Hegel would be the first to condemn it as fallacious. It is necessary to stress again that Hegel's own concept of the infinite does not exist beyond the finite world but only within it.

In proposing alternative interpretations of Hegel's work, scholars thus emphasise his critique of traditional metaphysics, his endorsement of Kant's critique of rationalism and his purely immanent conception of philosophy. On the other hand, these points do not necessarily imply that Hegel was not a metaphysician after all. If Hegel abjured metaphysics as a science of the transcendent, he still pursued it as a science of the immanent. Whether the unconditioned is beyond this world (or the world as a whole), it still remains the unconditioned. Arguably for Hegel, the problem with traditional metaphysics is not that it attempted to know the infinite, but that it held a *false interpretation* of the infinite as something transcending the finite world of ordinary experience. The chief problem I see with these alternative interpretations is that they can present a false dilemma: Hegel is either a dogmatic metaphysician or not really a metaphysician at all. The crucial assumption behind the dilemma is a very narrow notion of metaphysics as speculation about transcendent entities. However, given that Hegel did not share this notion of metaphysics, he clearly wanted to avoid just this dilemma. Working in a post-Kantian age, he was aware of the need to provide a new rationale for metaphysics. It was the central challenge of his philosophical career to provide a critical foundation for metaphysics, to base it upon a method that would satisfy the demands of the Kantian critique of knowledge. This method is his famous dialectic,²⁵ a method that will be shown later in the chapter to revision the role of negation.

²⁵ The dialectical process has commonly been regarded as a sort of engine for philosophical progress – perhaps the most powerful sort. Typically, dialecticians hold that thinking begins in a murky, incoherent morass of many, different, *other* opinions – some having a glimmer or partial grasp on the truth. Through engagements with these *others* along with their *negativity*, a more complete and comprehensive grasp of the *one* or *one-ness* that is truth emerges. Hence, for Plato, upon the wings of dialectic people can transcend the *many* images of the truth to grasp the *one* 'form' of which those images are copies (compare his images of the 'Divided Line' and the 'Charioteer of the Soul' in *Republic* 532^d (in Plato 1997d) and *Phaedrus* 276^e5-277^e6 (in Plato 1997c)). More particularly, Plato's dialectic involves discerning what makes things of a certain type the *same* as one another and *different* from other things, a process that has come to be known as his method of 'collection and division'. Kant conversely argued in the second division of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (2005) entitled 'Transcendental Dialectic' that when it comes to metaphysics, human thinking about ultimate reality must by its very nature fail to achieve wholeness, completion and truth; it can yield instead only endless, irresolvable conflict and illusion. This endless back-and-forth is, according to Kant, a trap rather than a path to truth. Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of*

Regarding the precise nature of Hegel's metaphysics, it is necessary to take a path between what can be called inflationary or exorbitant and deflationary or reductionist readings (Beiser 2005). While the former make the Absolute into a super-entity, the latter reduce it to nothing more than abstraction of particular things. Whereas the inflationary reading sees Hegel as a Platonist focused on the existence of abstract entities, deflationary readings posit him a nominalist who reduces universals down to particulars. That neither reading is particularly productive is apparent from a basic distinction stressed by Hegel himself and which is fundamental to his entire philosophy: the Aristotelian distinction between what is first in order of explanation and what is first in order of being.²⁶ According to Hegel, the universal is first in order of explanation, the particular first in order of existence. The universal is first in order of explanation because, to determine what some *thing* is, requires the ascription of universals to it. That is, we define the nature or essence of a thing through its properties, each of which is constitutively universal. The particular is first in order of existence, however, because to exist is always to be determinate and individualised, to be some *thing*. To say that the universal is prior to the particular does not mean, therefore, that it is a cause prior in time to the particular; it is rather only to say that it is the reason or purpose of the thing. This reason or purpose does not exist, as such, prior to the thing but comes into existence only through it, embodying itself through the complete and full development of the thing.²⁷

This crucial distinction offers a middle path between inflationary and deflationary readings of Hegel's metaphysics. Both readings confuse this distinction. The inflationary readings – of Hegel as a Platonist who thinks that universals exist beyond the historical and natural world – contend that logical priority also involves ontological priority, and so they hypostasise the idea as if it exists in itself, prior to its embodiment in the physical and historical world. But this would be to say that the universal could exist prior to and apart from the particular, a doctrine that Hegel emphatically denies (Beiser 2005; see, e.g., Hegel 1991b, 56-58 [*Encyclopaedia*,

Spirit (1977b), repudiated Kant's criticisms, maintaining not only that dialectics can grasp the wholeness of absolute truth but that reality itself in its metaphysical processes is dialectical.

²⁶ See Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1984a, 30-36 [Book V, 11, 1018^b], 3-20 [Book IX, 8, 1050^a]).

²⁷ My reading of Hegel is that reality is a totalising circle which presupposes its end as its purpose, and thus has its end for its beginning. Hegel's language, too, is such a circle in that each concept implicates the rest and may itself be viewed from the standpoint of any of the other concepts or the totality at varying stages of their respective developments. Thus, a single concept may encompass several meanings and a single meaning may be expressed by several concepts. Moreover, from a dialectical perspective, concepts in isolation from the process of which they are a part are abstractions and are, accordingly, inherently limited and one-sided, i.e., false. The value and accuracy of the definitions presented, then, are circumscribed by these structural considerations.

§24A]). The deflationary readings – of him as a nominalist who thinks that the meanings of universals are explicable entirely in terms of the particulars to which they refer – assume that Hegel’s insistence on ontological priority commits him to denying logical priority, as if the idea were nothing more than the sum of the particular things in which it exists. But Hegel appears to be first and foremost an Aristotelian: he thinks that universals exist only in things, even though their meaning is not reducible only to them. These points structure Hegel’s reflections on human existence and death,²⁸ as well as on the death of God.

Hegel’s Death of God and the Dialectic

Like everything in Hegel, his thought on the death of God is complex, carrying at least two interrelated meanings. On the one hand, for Hegel, the phrase ‘God is dead’ indicates that any separation or remoteness of the Absolute with regard to human consciousness in this world cannot be sustained, that any otherness or unknowability of the absolute must be thoroughly erased or overcome. God dies in his abstract transcendence and unmoving eternity so as to become temporally immanent and thus concretely known to this world and its history.²⁹ On the other hand, correlatively, through the realised presence of the Absolute in this world and its history, the finitude of human history itself (according to Hegel) will prove untrue or inessential. Finitude is seen as a transitory movement that is sublated or raised up within the realised infinitude of the Absolute. Annulling human finitude in this way, this death of God, for Hegel,

²⁸ Death is a major concern for post-Kantian philosophy in which several interrelated themes can be discerned: the death of the self and of others; death as a negation (in thought, language and the world); and the experience of mourning, dying, sacrifice and killing. In many works by European thinkers, death is the key to understanding subjectivity, ethics and politics. While each theorist represents the work of death differently, for each it is finitude and negativity that is at the heart of human existence. Death understood as negativity, as the negation or annihilation of an aspect of conceptual or material existence, structures Hegel’s reflections on human experience in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel’s dialectics may be understood as a negation and sublation that makes death into a productive transformation insofar as the original term or object is incorporated into a higher concept or stage. At the same time, death as the end of a particular human life is also evident in Hegel’s reflection: the different ways the master and the slave approach the fight to the death become a trope for the attainment of recognition and full human consciousness. Hegel’s observation that death “is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength” indicates that facing death, as life’s end and as non-actuality more generally, is imperative for human existing (Hegel 1977b, 19 [*Phenomenology*, Pref., ¶32]). It is this “tarrying with the negative”, embracing the negative rather than denying it by describing it as nothing or as false, that enables subjectivity and coming into being more generally (ibid).

²⁹ §§163-165 of the *Encyclopedia* (see 1991b, 239-243) explain the concept of a concrete concept, the particular as the object of thought in the strict sense, as opposed to mere abstract representation (generalities, class predications).

ultimately effects the death of death itself, according to which God dies so that death as such might be overcome.³⁰

In general terms, the phrase ‘the death of God’ in the *Phenomenology* has been taken as the motto and focus for the humanist interpretation of Hegel. The phrase, in various forms, appears often in Hegel’s writings: at the close of *Faith and Knowledge* (1977a, 191), in his discussion of the unhappy consciousness in the *Phenomenology* (1977b, 589 [*Phenomenology*, ¶787]), and finally throughout his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (see especially the third volume).³¹ As should already be clear, however, Hegel’s use of this phrase does not correlate with what Feuerbach or Nietzsche later mean by it: the irrelevance of faith in a more secular culture. Instead Hegel uses it to declare the (necessary) end of traditional Christianity and the need for a new religion (or for, at least, a new understanding of Christianity). In this context, whilst the phrase refers to the death of Christ, the son of God, on the cross,³² this death is recognised as only one moment in the life of the idea. It is, however, the “paradigmatic” expression of Hegel’s speculative philosophy (D. Anderson 1996, 46). It is the moment of negativity that is then – always – negated in a new resurrection, a point Hegel stresses in several ways:

³⁰ The opposite extreme of this finitising of God is to make him wholly transcendent, but in that case we cannot have any *relation* with him as, for instance, found in the Judeo-Christian and mystical traditions. Thus, theism appears trapped between the extremes of putting God altogether beyond reach or making him finite and therefore not God at all. In either case a *religious* relation is ruled out. The root cause of this predicament is that the finite and the infinite are conceived dualistically as separate and unrelated realities, whereas Hegel has been understood as saying, with some fierceness, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, that “we must get rid of this bugbear (*Schreckbild*) of the opposition of the finite and the infinite” (in Prabhu 1984, 79). Corresponding to this philosophic deficiency is the existential and practical one, in which the so-called sacred and secular are split apart in experience, each going its own way. But this again is to misconceive the secular as secular just as it is to misconceive the finite as the finite. For Hegel, as he states in the 14th lecture of his *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, ‘true’ secularity is affirmed when the “finite is not taken for itself, but is known, recognised, and its existence affirmed in connection with the relation in which it stands to the infinite”, and not when it “exists alongside of it and gives itself up to the pursuit of its own ends and is left to its own interest, without any influence being exercised upon it by the Infinite, the Eternal and the True” (Hegel n.d., §299).

³¹ Indeed, it has been argued that Hegel’s philosophical system can be read from the composite perspective of the final pages of several of his major works, where the death of God figures prominently (see D. Anderson 1996). Central to this inquiry would be Hegel’s *Faith and Knowledge* (1977a, 191) which, in its concluding sentence, gives utterance to the feeling that God himself has died. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* concludes with reference to “the Calvary of absolute spirit” (1977a, 493 [*Phenomenology*, ¶808]), and, as Solomon asks, “what is Golgotha [i.e. Calvary] other than the death of God?” (1989, 59, my insertion). *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* are also suggestive in their final passages to the death of God (see, e.g., 1985, 347 [*Phil Religion* III, 270]). *The Philosophy of History* alludes to the death of God at its end, calling the history of the world the only true theodicy, and contending that the reconciliation of spirit and world in the insight that God must be justified through the realisation of spirit in history, a realisation which entails the death of God, for being “without God” (1956, 457).

³² Hegel explains that the death of Christ – “a monstrous, fearful picture” (1985, 125 [*Phil Religion* III, 60]) – fills the Christian with “infinite grief” because God has withdrawn from the world by forsaking his only begotten son (1977a, 190 [*Faith*, Concl.]). Now that the mediator between humanity and God has died, it seems that there is no hope of redemption or resurrection.

Through death God has reconciled the world and reconciles ‘himself’ eternally with himself. This coming back again is his return to himself, and through it he is *spirit*. So this third moment is that Christ has risen. Negation is thereby overcome, and the negation of negation is thus a moment of the divine nature. (1985, 220 [*Phil of Religion* III, 150-51])

The death of God is *infinite* negation, and God maintains himself in death, so that this process is rather a putting to death of death, a resurrection into life. ... The abstractness of the Father is given up in the Son—this then is death. But the negation of this negation is the unity of Father and Son—love, or the Spirit. (ibid., 370 [ibid., 286-87])

Hegel as such suggests that we should interpret the death and resurrection of Christ not simply as an historical event, but as a metaphor for the life of the spirit. It expresses the fact (actuality, reality) that we must lose and discover ourselves in the experience of love (according to Hegel, under a Christian schema) and the development of reason (thus seeking to ‘rationalise’ Christianity).

Ultimately Hegel’s attitude toward Christianity (at least in his earlier writings of the Jena years between 1801 and 1807) might be classed as ambivalent. He wanted to unite paganism with Christianity, to divinise nature and to naturalise the divine. Both traditional Christian and humanist readings of Hegel fail to do justice to this attitude because they tend toward one-sidedness. The Christian does not see that Hegel intends to naturalise the divine; the humanist ignores that he wants to divinise nature. For the same reason, the common statement that Hegel secularises the Christian tradition is both profoundly correct and profoundly misleading. It is correct because Hegel naturalises the concept of God, denying its supernatural status and making it immanent in the world, making God inseparable from nature and history.³³ However, it is also misleading because it suggests that Hegel reduces God down to the level of the natural and history, as if he were nothing more than the totality of natural and historical events. This, again, does not see that Hegel wanted to divinise nature and history as much as to naturalise and historicise the divine.

³³ Hegel’s project, in part, tries to cognise God within the context of a Christian framework, for which Hegel’s philosophical designation is the ‘consummate’ or even ‘revelatory’ religion. The concept of God, under Hegel’s scheme, is that he is the absolute idea, or is the idea of Absolute Spirit. Hegel (1984) sets out that this concept has ‘reality’ (*Realität*), that ‘being’ (*Sein*) or ‘existence’ (*Existenz*) is contained in it. In many ways, Hegel attempts to overcome the restraints Kant had placed on metaphysics, with Hegel specifically attacking the dichotomy between appearances and things-in-themselves. Any limitation, he argued, requires a recognition of what stands beyond the limit. That is, as he puts it in his *Encyclopaedia*, “it is precisely the designation of something as finite or restricted that contains the proof of the *actual presence* of the Infinite, or Unrestricted, and that there can be no knowledge of limit unless the Unlimited is *on this side* within consciousness” (1991b, 106 [*Encyclopaedia*, §60], emphasis original).

It is important to avoid inflating or deflating Hegel's concept of the divine. Under Hegel's thinking, the divine is first in the order of explanation, but not first in the order of existence. If it comes to existence only in nature and history, it also cannot be reduced down to the sum total of all historical and natural events, for it is the whole that makes all these events possible.³⁴ The traditional Christian interpretation is guilty of inflating Hegel's concept of God, as if it were first not only in essence but also in existence; it then appears as if God denotes a substance that, because it is conceptually prior to the world, also exists prior to it. The traditional humanist interpretation is guilty of deflating Hegel's concept as if it were secondary in essence because it is so in existence; it then seems as if God is nothing more than the sum total of all particular things, a mere pious term for the universe.

To examine again Hegel's concept of God, whilst keeping in mind that, for Hegel, "philosophy *is* theology" (1984, 84 [*Phil Religion* I, 4]), and, further to this, that God alone is both their object (1991b, 24 [*Encyclopaedia*, §1]), is to say that although philosophy and theology have the same object does not mean that they are identical. Although they do not differ in content – in what they (claim) to know – they do differ in form – in how they know their object. Philosophy knows God through the medium of concepts, and religion knows God through the medium of feelings and intuition (1991b, 24-27 [*Encyclopaedia*, §§2-3]). Hegel calls the feelings and intuitions of religion 'representations' (*Vorstellungen*).³⁵ As a more reflective or self-conscious form of religion for Hegel, the task of philosophy is to replace representation with concepts. He writes: "philosophy puts *thoughts* and *categories*, but more precisely *concepts*, in the place of representations" (1991b, 26 [*Encyclopaedia*, §3]). The crucial question for Hegel's reconciliation is whether philosophy really can translate the representations of religion into conceptual form. If philosophy distorts these representations³⁶ by putting them in discursive form, there will be no identity between philosophy and religion after all. What becomes important for this dissertation, in terms of Hegel's quest for

³⁴ For a post-modern engagement with event-thinking, see Caputo's (2006b) *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* in which Caputo moves beyond considering God as merely a name and instead searches for the event that stirs within the name and what it promises in the future.

³⁵ Hegel understands all talk of God, and religious discourse in general, to be a figurative way of expressing philosophical truths, utilising myths, images and metaphors (what he calls 'picture-thinking' or representational thinking). Nevertheless, he continually slides back and forth between philosophical and theological language.

³⁶ Representation for Hegel functions in a similar way to the transcendental imagination in Kant, and it refers to a schematism, the providing of a schema, which is not an image in a literal sense. Whereas the transcendental imagination troubled Kant because it threatened to mix up the empirical and the transcendental, for Hegel the process of representation is more straightforwardly and productively a process of temporalisation, a temporal formation.

reconciliation, is his general argument for the possibility of a dialectic, for a revisioning of the role of negation.³⁷

The most fundamental, powerful – and perhaps seductive – theme in Hegel’s philosophy is the promise and fulfilment of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*).³⁸ Hegel keeps returning to the theme of reconciliation throughout his writings, playing out the variations on it. Although reconciliation retains quasi-theological overtones, it is ultimately the task and achievement of philosophy to show how differences, oppositions, ruptures, conflicts, and contradictions can be reconciled in a dynamic self-identical and self-differentiating totality. In his first published work, *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s Systems of Philosophy*, Hegel declared that the “need” for philosophy “arises” when the “might of union vanishes from the life of men” (1977c, 91). Hegel experienced a profound sense of the crisis inflicted by diremption (*Entzweiung*) or forcible separation, of the traumas accompanying such splits and antagonisms as they occur throughout culture.³⁹ He also held an equally profound sense of the healing power of Reason. Recognising that the modern world had lost the kind of “unmediated and unselfconscious harmony and unity of human life, a thorough integration of every aspect of culture” attributed to the Greek *polis* (Bernstein 2013, 293; Gray 1941),⁴⁰ Hegel’s early desires to regain such an integration were replaced by his proposed dynamic models of reconciliation. His aim thus becomes one of showing

³⁷ Hegel’s dialectic operates through negation – in fact it would be accurate to describe negation as the ‘mechanism’ of dialectic itself. The passage from one category to another in the Hegelian dialectic always involves negation. The paradigm for such dialectical transitions is to be found in the *Logic*, where the transitions between categories are thought by Hegel to exhibit strong necessity and rigor. Each category in the *Logic* (construct) is understood to be a provisional definition of the Absolute (of the whole), but each proves inadequate given that it is always found in some manner to presuppose, depend upon, or simply be related to another category, often what seems at first glance to be its opposite. Thus in the dialectic each category is negated by the category that follows it. This continual negation of one category by another allows Hegel to progressively articulate the Idea, which is the system of these mutually dependent, yet mutually negating concepts. As noted above, the *Logic* provides the Hegelian paradigm for dialectical negation – but within the logic (construct) the paradigm of dialectic is the sequence of concepts at the very beginning: being-nothing-becoming. Furthermore, dialectic is not simply something characteristic of concepts: Hegel sees the entire world as an internally related system of interdependent yet antagonistic elements. As Heraclitus famously said, “the finest harmony is composed of things at variance, and everything comes to be in accordance with strife” (Heraclitus B8 in Curd 1996, 35). Negation is involved in the coming into being of anything. To borrow (and adapt) Hegel’s metaphor from the Preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the bud is negated by the blossom, which in turn is negated by the fruit. Yet each is a moment in an organic unity. They negate each other, but are absolutely necessary for each other.

³⁸ As Habermas notes, “The motives for a philosophy of unification can be traced back to the crisis of experience of the young Hegel. They stand behind the conviction that reason must be brought forward as the reconciling power against the positive elements of an age torn asunder” (1990, 21-22). “By criticizing the philosophic oppositions – nature and spirit, sensibility and understanding, understanding and reason, theoretical and practical reason, judgment and imagination, I and the non-I, finite and infinite, knowledge and faith – he wants to respond to the crisis of the diremption of life itself” (ibid., 21).

³⁹ I refer here to philosophy, ethics, politics, religion and the arts.

⁴⁰ These themes of fragmentation and rupture will be discussed in greater detail from Chapter Six onwards.

how a new mediated integration, a new self-differentiated totality – in which all oppositions can be both held and reconciled – may emerge.

So far, this chapter has set out how Hegel is fundamental to thinking ‘God is dead’. He is also to my mind instrumental in attempting to articulate what it might be to think beyond traditional ‘God as centre’ representational structures. This contribution to thinking beyond traditional representations of God needs further examination. The genealogy of ‘God’ thus far traced via the various discourses of monotheism I have examined, is theistically loaded, in the sense of primarily referring one way or another, kataphatically or apophatically, to a personal, transcendent Being who creates the universe and sustains it. Hegel does not simply reject this conception but sublates (*aufhebt*) it inasmuch as he views it as an inadequate and essentially representational way of viewing Absolute Spirit. I will show why Hegel is uncomfortable with orthodox theism later on, but at this stage I can remark that the remote transcendence of the God of theism smacks too much of what Hegel calls (reflecting some apophatic insights) the ‘bad infinite’⁴¹ – an infinite merely set out over against the finite, and therefore external to or bounded by the finite. This, for Hegel, is to render God a being among other beings and thus to make him finite. Hegel’s rehabilitation of the proofs for the existence of God thus have little to do with proving his existence in the strict sense. As he puts this, because bare existence is such a limited notion, to say that God exists is to say that he is like any other finite thing, and therefore not God at all.

Hegel, then, is not only a philosopher of reconciliation but also a philosopher of rupture, and it is with this that he arguably surpasses the apophatic tradition. These are two necessary and intrinsic aspects of the dialectical process. For, under Hegel’s thinking, it is only by the violent rupture of itself – diremption – that Spirit (*Geist*) achieves reconciliation with itself. This is the dialectical power of negativity, what he argues is the “power to hold and endure the contradiction” within Spirit (1969, 440). Hegel captures this antithetical tendency of the concept Being to “turn against itself” (“self-destruct”, or “repel itself from itself” from within), in a way that tracks the manner in which the corresponding empirical object relates itself to its inner opposed forces (*ibid.*). He describes, also in the *Science of Logic*, the aporetic role that contradiction plays in moving concepts toward the goal of conceptual determinacy in the following terms: “Only when the manifold terms have been driven to the point of contradiction do they become active and lively toward one another, receiving in contradiction the negativity which is the indwelling pulsation of self-movement and

⁴¹ For my explication of Hegel’s use of bad infinite see in this chapter, 176n21.

spontaneous activity [*Lebendigkeit*]” (in Deleuze 1994, 44; cf. Hegel 1969, 439). This power of negativity, which Hegel associates with death, is also expressed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* when he declares:

The life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself ... Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being. (Hegel 1977b, 19 [*Phenomenology*, Pref., ¶32])

To understand what Hegel means here, to grasp this necessary interplay of rupture and reconciliation, requires consideration of his distinction between abstract and determinate negation – a distinction which is furthermore closely related to abstract and determinate scepticism (dialectic).

Abstract negation is the type of negation attached to the static binary opposition between, for instance, the true and the false. This is, as Hegel puts this, “the law of the excluded middle: *something is either A or not-A; there is no third*” (1969, 438, original emphasis). From this perspective, the true and the false are eternally opposed to each other: the abstract negation of the true is the false just as the abstract negation of the false is the true. This is the form of the negation that is entrenched in the common understanding of propositional logic. Abstract scepticism, which employs this notion of abstract negation:

Is just the scepticism which only ever sees pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of *that from which it results*. ... The scepticism that ends up with the bare abstraction of nothingness or emptiness cannot get any further from there, but must wait to see whether something new comes along, and what it is, in order to throw it too into the same empty abyss. (Hegel 1977b, 51, original emphasis [*Phenomenology*, Intro., ¶79])

Abstract negation informs the idea of meaningless (abstract) death, of taking death to be only empty nothingness. Abstract negation, thus informed by an abhorrence of contradiction (cf. Hegel 1969, 442), is the only form of negation available to what Hegel calls ‘natural consciousness’, ‘commonsense’, ‘ordinary thinking’ and to the Kantian conception of understanding (*Verstand*). Hegel, however, throughout his work, contests this notion of abstract negation. Or, more accurately, he strives to show its limitations, contending that it is not the form of negation appropriate to dialectical

philosophy and speculative (*begreifende*) thinking. It is not the form of negation that reveals the ‘power of negativity’ by which Spirit ruptures and reconciles itself.

Determinate negation is the form of negation where the result of negation “is conceived as it is in truth”, where “a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the completed series of forms comes about of itself” (Hegel 1977b, 51 [*Phenomenology*, Intro., ¶79]). The logic of Spirit is the logic of determinate negation (dialectic) whereby any given moment is at once negated, affirmed, and superseded. Hegel tells us in the *Phenomenology of Science*: “Because the result, the negation, is a specific negation it has a content. It is a fresh concept but higher and richer than its predecessor for it is richer by the negation or opposite of the latter” (Hegel 1977b, 51 [*Phenomenology*, ¶74]). The teleological development of determinate negation can be traced in both the *Phenomenology of Science* (1977b) and the *Science of Logic* (1991b). Determinate negation is at once critical and constructive. To come to a better understanding of this double (that is, critical and constructive) character of determinate negation, I believe it is useful to think of the logic of determinate negation as having both a critical and constructive aspect. It is critical because it does not accept what a body of thought, a philosophical system, or even an entire culture says about itself, but is concerned to confront that thought, system, or culture with its own internal tensions, incoherencies, and anomalies. It is constructive because out of this negation or confrontation ever more complete, comprehensive, and coherent bodies of propositions and forms can be developed. There is, then, a dynamic developmental structure to the Hegelian determinate negation by which human arrangements become progressively more adequate as a result of their tensions and contradictions being exposed and brought to light.⁴² All science, just like all society, is the result of a cumulative process of externally imposing a criterion of adequacy, but against self-imposed standards of truth. The true system of thought, like the rational form of life, does not stand over and against the others like the ‘lifeless universal’, but grows out of a progressive deepening and enrichment, where nothing is ever lost or wasted but is overcome and preserved in a newer, more comprehensive whole. This is the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, in which lesser and

⁴² For Hegel, “The one thing needed to *achieve scientific progress* ... is the recognition of the logical principle that negation is equally positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its *particular* content ... Because the result, the negation, is a *determinate* [i.e. specific] negation, it has a *content*” (2010b, 33 [*Logic*, Intro.], original emphasis, my insertion).

more inadequate forms of life are both annulled and preserved in the higher ones.⁴³ This is also reminiscent of the German idealism which cannot but fail to take into account the possibility of the Holocaust and the rupture that such an event sparks in the thinking of philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt, Jean-François Lyotard and Giorgio Agamben.⁴⁴

What is difficult in reading Hegel is understanding what (for him) it is to *think*. He will not countenance a splitting of the world into active mind and passive matter, insides and outsides: thought as a process, thought as a something that falls upon a reality otherwise undiscovered. Indeed, as has been seen in this chapter, for Hegel (and later, of course, for Heidegger), thinking is what we *do*; we cannot think ourselves not thinking. Having traced Hegel's philosophy on thinking – thinking the Absolute, the concept of God, the dialectic, etc. – it is possible to say that we cannot *begin* to think, or decide to take up a thinking stance towards something called Absolute Spirit (the World or God) by analysing it into primitive components like essence and predicates. If thinking is what we do then thinking is contemporaneous with our being around in the first place. Yet we cannot think that bare fact of 'being around' without thinking a context for it – which means we cannot think what it is to think *in the abstract*; we think our being and our thinking in their concrete, time-taking actuality. We think in relation to particulars but we cannot think particulars as strictly particulars, because we cannot concretely think a pure self-identity. To think a particular (God) is to think 'this, not that' (my God, not yours); here, not there; now, not then'. Two themes that surface here (and will be revisited in greater detail in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight when applied to biblical texts) are, first, that there is no concrete identity that is not 'mediated', that is, realised and maintained by something other than itself alone, and second, that really to think what is other is to discover its otherness as implicated in the act of thinking, and the thinking implicated in the otherness.

What is interesting for my purpose is how Hegel gives the dialectic a clear theological point of reference. Dialectic is what theology means by the power of God,

⁴³ To describe the activity of overcoming the negative, Hegel also often used the term *Aufhebung*, variously translated into English as 'sublation' or 'overcoming', to conceive of the working of the dialectic. Roughly, the term indicates preserving the useful portion of an idea, thing, society, etc., while moving beyond its limitations. Derrida's preferred French translation of the term was *la relève* (Derrida 1982a, 19-20n23). In the *Science of Logic* (1991b), for instance, Hegel describes a dialectic of existence: first, existence must be posited as pure Being (*Sein*); but pure Being, upon examination, is found to be indistinguishable from Nothing (*Nichts*). When it is realised that what is coming into being is, at the same time, also returning to nothing (in life, for example, one's living is also a dying), both Being and Nothing are united as Becoming (see Hegel 1977b, 79-80 [*Phenomenology*, §§132, 133, 134]).

⁴⁴ For some explorations of this rupture, see, for instance, Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg's (2003) *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, and Dorota Glowacka's (2012) *Disappearing Traces: Holocaust Testimonials, Ethics, and Aesthetics*.

just as *Verstand* is what theology means by the goodness of God (1991b, 127 [*Encyclopaedia*, §80]). *Verstand* says ‘everything can be thought’, ‘nothing is beyond reconciliation’, every percept makes sense in a distinctness, a uniqueness, that is in harmony with an overall environment. It is, as traditional theology might say, a doctrine of providence, in that it claims that there can be no such thing as unthinkable contingency. But, as seen earlier in this chapter, thinking the particular in its harmonies, thinking how the particular makes sense, breaks the frame of reference in which we think the particular. God’s goodness has to give way to God’s power – but to a power which acts only in a kind of self-devastation. In addition, Hegel believes that the ‘speculative’ stage to which the dialectic finally leads us is what religion has meant by the mystical, which is not, he insists, the fusion of subject and object but the concrete (historical?) unity or continuity or follow-ability of what *Verstand* alone can only think fragmentarily or episodically (*ibid.*).⁴⁵

Although the theology underlying the *Logic* has not been given much weight nor unpacked in any great detail in this chapter, it is worth contextualising the importance of Hegel’s work for theology’s attempts to think ‘God’. Hegel here anticipates some of what he notes in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* about divine predicates: considered as describing different ‘qualities’ of God, they fall short of actually bringing God into speech because they deal with what look like multiple determinations (1985, 277-279 [*Phil of Religion* III, 202-203]). And, since God is not (as all classical theology agrees) a determinate object or a member of a class, these predicates collapse upon themselves. And, if they are interpreted as relating to God’s action upon the world, they fall short once again of speaking of God as God. The divine predicates cannot express the concrete life of God when they are taken as denoting discrete properties subsisting alongside each other. In the light of this later discussion, what is said in the *Logic* acquires added depth and interest. The *Logic* addressed the fundamental question of the process of thinking concretely; and it is Hegel’s contention all along – as I have argued – that to think about thinking is to think about, or rather to think within, an infinite relatedness, a comprehensive intelligibility. To say, as Hegel effectively does in the *Logic*, that this is to think God (and, under Christian theology, to participate in God), is to acknowledge that a comprehensive and unitary metaphysic is unlikely to be able to dispense (certainly in the western intellectual tradition) with the term that has

⁴⁵ There is something in common here with Wittgenstein’s (1963, 6.45) definition of the mystical, in the sense that the *Tractatus* assimilates *das Mystische* to the sensation of the world as a (determinate) whole. The debate between them would be, I suspect, about the meaning of ‘determinate’. Hegel would certainly repudiate any suggestions that the world could be thought of as a very large ‘individual’, but it is not clear whether this is anywhere near what Wittgenstein means.

historically grounded a trust in the thinkable (and thus reconcilable) character of reality. But when this slightly banal observation had been made, should it be concluded that the explicit theological reference is window-dressing, concealing an underlying secularism? Taking into account the current radical rethinking and extension of Hegel's work, such as Catherine Malabou,⁴⁶ it is worth answering 'no' to the preceding question. No, because it is precisely the grammar (including the paradoxes or 'contradictions' as Hegel would put it) of traditional pre-Cartesian theology that shapes the actual structure of thinking about thinking.⁴⁷ To think about thinking must, for Hegel, bring us finally to the point to which traditional theology (would like) to direct us, to a reality that is determined solely as self-relatedness: the grammar of the God of Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas is the grammar of thought, and without the former the scope of the latter could not be apprehended. The unthinkability of God in the tradition, the recognition that discrete predicates are a clumsy vehicle for indicating divine simplicity, is transmuted by Hegel into the conviction that to think is to think ultimate simplicity, indivisibility and self-relation.

Conclusion

To discursively trace the death of God with Nietzsche and Hegel means, among other things, to confront a dynamic field of crises and questions that touch fundamentally on the functions of language and representation in the articulation of God (and self). The difficulty, necessity and fruitfulness of confrontation are known acutely and in multiple ways by those across the fields of philosophy and religion, literary and cultural studies, and critical and psychoanalytic theory, who find themselves somehow in or near a 'post-' age whose blurred and shifting boundaries are marked, however ambiguously, by a disappearance of God and by a dissolution of the human subject. How might the

⁴⁶ Malabou's extension (or possibly, corruption) of Hegel's 'plasticity' with neuroscience, psychoanalysis, trauma and philosophy has been praised for extending thinking at the intersections of political philosophy, biology and medicine. See Malabou (2004; 2008; 2012a; 2012b).

⁴⁷ Hegel believed that "the forms of thought are first set out and stored in human language" (2010b, 12 [*Logic*, Pref. to 2nd ed.]). Hence language is not (as it was, for example, for Nietzsche) something which deceives, deludes, and distracts us from reality. Hegel's position is closer to that of the early Wittgenstein: language can only succeed (as it clearly does) in speaking about reality because both share the same logical form. Hence the route to conceptual knowledge lies through the insights sedimented into language. In particular, there are certain words that unite apparently contradictory meanings. Teasing apart such double lines of thought converts a predicative to a speculative proposition. The most famous such word in Hegel is *Aufheben*, which contains the meanings both of preserving and abolishing. The movement it names (each stage of thought both retained and transcended) is that of the Hegelian dialectic.

seeming absence and unknowability of God, however figured, be tied to the once enlightened and autonomous subject of the European Enlightenment?

This questioning of language and representation in the ‘post-’ age arises precisely with their crises: for we can now ask, in what sense do the slips and failures of language and representation, their silences and blind spots, prove in fact internal and essential to their very operation? As provoked specifically by the death of God thinking (from Hegel and Nietzsche), and by an associated critique of subjectivity (from thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Heidegger, to Levinas and Derrida), such a questioning of language and representation is integral to and constitutive of the modern and postmodern frameworks. At the same time, however, as indicated by the significant body of scholarship that has been growing now for three decades (especially the last), the ‘negative’ operations of language and representation regarding God (and the human subject), or the functions of such language and representation only in and through their silences and failures, are in fact also fundamental to the decidedly premodern traditions of apophatic and mystical theology and spiritual practice set out in Chapter Four. Indeed, the forms of language and representation that define the classic tradition of negative or apophatic theology (and its twin, mystical theology) – both informing the *via negativa* – have recently attracted sustained and creative inquiry and re-development especially among scholars who are concerned with the finitude of the human subject and with the marks or conditions of such finitude – above all, the subject’s insurmountable ‘thrownness’ into language, its radically temporal dynamic and its subjection to desire.⁴⁸ For post-Heideggerian thinkers in particular, as will be examined in Chapter Six, fascination with the textual and discursive traditions deriving from the apophatic and mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius almost always also involves a fascination with the finitude temporal, and desiring subject of language – to the point where contemporary interest in the *via negativa* might be suspected to constitute at heart a fascination with a kind of negative anthropology.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ There are many diverse exemplars of this avenue of thinking, including the work of Quentin Meillassoux (2008), and Jean-Luc Nancy (2000). In particular, Meillassoux’s (2008) *After Finitude* could be considered to be one of the finest critiques of the history of modern thought, critiquing its humanism, immanent metaphysics, and anti-materialism. Meillassoux develops a speculative materialism by rewriting correlationism to develop a new philosophy of science and an innovative view on how to move away from Kant.

⁴⁹ The classic text as one example of this focus is Wolfhart Pannenberg’s (1999) *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, although more recent luminaries include Kevin Hart, Jean-Luc Marion, Thomas Carlson, John D. Caputo, Jean Greisch and Dominic Janicaud. By way of example, an undergraduate course *D217 Theological Anthropology*, coordinated by Dr. Michael Jackson at Murdoch University (1991), held as a core concern to develop a systematic understanding of humanity (what it means to be human) within the framework of a Christian doctrine of the human person. The course is arguably an example of the phenomenological (re)turn to religion.

The implications of thinking such ‘otherness’, and what such a thinking might entail, lead back again to one of the oldest and most persistent questions in Western philosophy: the ‘problem’ of the one and the many, and/or identity and difference. It is fair to argue that Western onto-theology began with this ‘problem’. I write of *the* ‘problem’ in inverted commas because – as so happens in onto-theology – there are *many* problems under this rubric. Nevertheless, I can claim that onto-theologic thinkers have consistently been concerned with understanding what underlies and pervades the multiplicity, diversity, and sheer contingency encountered in daily life. Is there some fundamental unity that encompasses this multiplicity? Is there a one (One), *eidos*, universal, form, genus that is essential to the multiplicity of particulars? What is the character of this essential unity? It can be argued – and indeed has been – that the dominant tendency in western onto-theology has been to privilege and valorise unity, harmony, totality – full presence – and thereby denigrate, suppress, or marginalise multiplicity, contingency, particularity, singularity. The problem of the one and the many and/or identity and difference can take on many different ontic forms; it arises not only in metaphysics, but also in epistemology, ethics, politics and religion.⁵⁰

Tracing the history of onto-theology as an attempt to reconcile identity and difference, makes clear why Hegel might be seen as the culmination of this tradition. More systematically and thoroughly than many previous philosophers, Hegel sought to think through a “final solution” to this problem (1991a, 267-269 [*Phil of Right*, §§246-247]). Hegel himself claimed that the entire tradition of Western philosophy achieves its *telos* with the unity of identity and difference. Ironically, almost every philosopher since Hegel has rejected his ‘solution’. But Hegel already brilliantly noted and indeed anticipated what has been deeply troubling for many post-Hegelian thinkers. This can be seen clearly in the section ‘Absolute Freedom and Terror’ in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There Hegel adumbrates the dialectic of what happens when an abstract universalism, an abstract “universal will”, ascends the throne “without any power being able to resist it” (1977b, 357 [*Phenomenology*, §585]). The demand for (of) abstract universal freedom inevitably leads to terror: “In this absolute freedom, therefore, all

⁵⁰ Even the debates between so-called communitarians and anti-communitarians can be viewed from this perspective. Anti-communitarians are deeply suspicious of any claim that compromises the independence and ontological irreducibility of individuals, while communitarians argue that a theory of the individual or self that does not acknowledge the reality of common bonds that unite individuals leads to a shallow and inadequate understanding of social and political life. Whilst the debate between communitarians and anti-communitarians is not directly related to this dissertation, the operation at work in the tension between the independence of individuals (and subsequent arguments for their ontological irreducibility), and the intersectional of socio-political relationships demonstrates the incommensurability of certain types of thinking. The example should once again bring the importance of function to the forefront as I move from Hegel’s metaphysics to Heidegger’s criticisms of a western metaphysics of presence.

social groups or classes which are the spiritual spheres into which the whole is articulated are abolished” (ibid.). It is doubly ironic that even though Hegel contrasts the terror of abstract universal freedom with the struggle for, and actualisation of, concrete freedom as the *telos* of history, post-Hegelian philosophers have not only been sceptical of Hegel’s relentless drive toward a grand *Aufhebung*,⁵¹ they have accused him of furthering a new more subtle and pernicious form of terror in his own demanding for *totality*.

In order to address the issue of the demand for totality, particularly with regard to the problematic of ‘God as centre’ thinking, a second *destruktive* pathway opened up by Heidegger will be mapped in Chapter Six. The name of the method by which Heidegger reads the past history of Western philosophy, *destruktion* pursues two different strategies that are significant to this dissertation, one positive and the other negative. While the negative strategy seeks to demonstrate how history has distorted the meaning of Being, the positive strategy demonstrates how such a meaning can also be retrieved from the margins of the same history. (This process of retrieval from the margins will also feature in my discussion of Derrida’s deconstructive engagement with the *via negativa* and the metaphysics of presence later in Chapters Seven and Eight, Heidegger’s thinking of *destruktion* being an important precursor to Derrida’s deconstruction). Of particular significance to this dissertation, however, is to trace *destruktion* as a pathway opened up by Heidegger’s conception of ontological difference (*die ontologische Differenz*) – used to mark the distinction between Being (*das Sein*) and beings or entities (*das Seiende*) – and his call for a radical rethinking of Western metaphysics. The word *Differenz*, from the Latin *differre* – literally ‘to carry apart’ – implies that “beings and being are somehow carried apart from each other, separated and yet related to each other, – and of their own accord, not just on the basis of an ‘act’ of ‘distinguishing’ [*Unterscheidung*]” (Heidegger 1991a, 209). These notions of separation, ambiguity and *destruktion*, themselves recognisably ideas pursued by Hegel, albeit in a different way, are here again visible links to the *via negativa* as set out in Chapter Four. More specifically they might be able to be read as a reprisal of the *via negativa*’s attempt to articulate God as the One and Only, as mythical vision, as the One not spoken, the one hidden.

⁵¹ It should be remembered that *Aufhebung* in Hegel’s thought has a threefold meaning. It is a suspending-preserving-reconciliation. Hegel’s attempt to establish a connection between time and spirit (*Geist*) and to explain how spirit as history can “fall into time” will be discussed in the following chapter and compared with Heidegger’s attempt to explain how world-time belongs to the temporality of here-being.

Chapter Six

Dis-closing Biblical Discourses

Onto-theology or Another Discourse for Presencing (as) Monotheism

My brief elaboration of Nietzsche's 'death of God' thinking in the previous chapter outlined a discursive pathway through Hegel's work on a metaphysics of presence and (as) monotheism as one articulation of what I have called the *via moderna negativa*, the modern re-consideration of the limits of thought's capacities. In this sense, Hegel's work, in setting out a process of the dialectic and attempting the totalisation of metaphysics, informed an effort to reframe not only 'God' but philosophy's response to the divine in line with the *via moderna negativa*.¹ Hegel's thinking indeed traced a number of productive and provocative trajectories for the *via moderna negativa* including the idea that God develops over the course of time (as does human consciousness), examination concerning what it is to think and to think negatively, and the idea of *aufhebung* or sublation and the way in which it operates with philosophical concepts such as God. However, Hegel's totalising (and unapologetically Christian) metaphysical system of thought exposes similar aporias to those identified in earlier chapters in which theology either treated the Bible as historical artefact, or proposed the *via negativa*. What has become evident, however, is that all of these various ways of thinking 'God' and reading Biblical texts promote problematic claims to presence (of Monotheism, 'God', History, Salvation, Chosenness, Sovereignty, etc).

Also heralded by Nietzsche's madman, Heidegger, in his turn, has given the discourse of presence a new intensity with his interpretation of metaphysics as onto-theology, claiming that the questions of God (*metaphysica specialis*) and of Being (*metaphysica generalis*) have been intertwined since the beginnings of Western philosophy (Heidegger 1997, 7-8). Heidegger's reading of the metaphysical tradition

¹ As discussed in Chapter Five, Hegel attempts to reconfigure God away from the transcendental understanding of presencing favoured by much apophatic and kataphatic philosophy and theology. Recall my interpretation of Hegel's reorientation on thinking, or more properly, what it is to think (see Chapter Five, 189). More specifically, Hegel's focus on thinking and representation, coupled with the Hegelian *Aufhebung* (suspending, preserving, reconciliation), are of interest for this dissertation while Hegel's 'final solution' or other demands for totality risk revisiting the impasse 'God as centre' thinking is riven by.

leads him to the view that all western metaphysical systems make foundational (positive) claims best understood as ‘onto-theological’. Metaphysics establishes the conceptual parameters of intelligibility by ontologically grounding and theologically legitimating our changing historical sense of what is. According to Heidegger, this entanglement of theology and metaphysics does not constitute onto-theology as the thinking of God in terms of Being (Heidegger 2010a; 2008d; 2002). It is rather the other way around, the entanglement results from the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics in which the highest being (God) and beings in their Being reciprocally ground each other (ibid.). The Heideggerian analysis of onto-theology implies, however, a second and perhaps more dramatic implication. Given the reciprocal grounding of theology and metaphysics – and Caputo’s (2006a) point that *and* is the most important word in any speaking of metaphysics and theology – anything happening to the grounding power of either one must have direct consequences for the other. Under such thinking, Nietzsche’s proposed ‘death of God’ can only lead to a destabilisation of metaphysics, and any proclamation of the ‘end’ of metaphysics will result in a theological crisis.² By elucidating (and then problematising) Heidegger’s claim that all Western metaphysics and theology share this onto-theological structure, I reconstruct the most important components of the original and provocative account of the history of metaphysics that Heidegger gives in support of his understanding of metaphysics.

This chapter will thus open and trace a second, Heideggerian, pathway from Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’ thinking, one that further highlights the impossibility of any

² The contributors to *Religion after Metaphysics* (Wrathall, ed., 2003) each respond to the thesis that the ‘end of metaphysics’ entails a transformation of religion, which is to say a transformation of theological thinking and the philosophy of religion. To the majority of the contributors – as with, earlier, one would expect, the proponents of the *via negativa* – the qualification ‘after metaphysics’ signifies a sense of relief over the liberation of religion from an alien, unfitting or oppressive set of concepts. For them the ‘end of metaphysics’ holds the promise of a new sense and thinking of religion beyond, or without, ontology. Others in the volume, however, reject the Heideggerian analysis of onto-theology, believing that it is based on a misconception of religion’s (historical) engagement with the question of Being. They challenge the idea that religious thought is fundamentally dependent on ontological figures and counter the notion that the ‘end of metaphysics’ has any consequences for religion. Several contributors point toward the Jewish philosophical tradition for alternative views of the relation between ‘Athens’ and ‘Jerusalem’. For example, see work done on the relation of Athens and Jerusalem under the term ‘jewgreek’ in Derrida’s discussion of Levinas’ project in “Violence and Metaphysics” (Derrida 1978d, 153), and a similar one – ‘Judeo-Greek’ – in his “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’” (2002c, 292). Caputo, in his turn, uses ‘jewgreek’ throughout his work to describe the possibility of a minimally metaphysical justice. See his *Against Ethics* (1993, 258n61; also Mummery 2005) for an explication of ‘jewgreek’. These thinkers tend to dissolve the distinction between Athens and Jerusalem. Also see Skip Horton-Parker (2007, 47) who suggests that “What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem (or Azusa St.)?” is not only a “candidate for inclusion among the eternal questions”, but can be answered with “plenty”. In contradistinction, Leora Batnitzky argues that contemporary philosophers and theologians must recognise precisely that distinction, and that denial of the distinction between Athens and Jerusalem is dangerous because it is ultimately reductive to history, and because it raises philosophy to religious heights (Batnitzky 2007).

full articulation or legitimation of both positive and negative constructions of monotheism, God and presence. It also lays out another pathway for tracing the problematic genealogy of the *via moderna negativa*, primarily mapping, in this instance, Heidegger's destrukutive retrieval of metaphysics. This, as will be examined below, marks a re-reading – a translation – of the idea of disclosure, but one which makes apparent not any full presence per se but rather exposes the giving – what Heidegger names *Ereignis* – of presence and Being, its giving of itself “as the event of Appropriation” (Heidegger 1972, 21). And this, it will be shown, is the eventality of the belonging together of Being and time (1972, 19), a disclosure that not only emphasizes the *via moderna negativa*'s need to find another way to unfold and understand presence, but which further sketches the basis for a possible pathway to the culmination of this dissertation: the disclosure of monotheism's own deconstruction.³ The eventality of this disclosure will be explored in this chapter through consideration of Heidegger's projected pathways in conjunction with Franz Rosenzweig's proposals of translation marking a form of ontological retrieval.

Metaphysics and Onto-theology

With the '*cogito sum*' Descartes had claimed that he was putting philosophy on a new and firm footing. But what he left undetermined when he began this 'radical' way, was the kind of Being which belongs to the *res cogitans* [thinking thing], or—more precisely—the *meaning of the Being of the 'sum'*. (Heidegger 2004a, 46)

Since Plato, philosophers in the west have proposed various conceptions of a supreme being as the ground of the existence and intelligibility of all that is. In the works of Augustine (and perhaps before) this metaphysical god became identified with the Judeo-Christian God. In modernity, however, such foundationalist conceptions of God were considered increasingly implausible (Horton-Parker 2007). The decline of the metaphysical God was perhaps first noted when Blaise Pascal declared that the God of

³ As will be shown, the significance for thinking lies in the profound implications for our understanding of a range of crucial signifiers – signifiers which have come to the fore in recent (post 1968) thinking – and which I will draw on later in this dissertation. For example, incommensurability, otherness, alterity, singularity, *différance*, and plurality – these signifiers reverberate through much of twentieth and, so far, twenty first century philosophical and theological thought.

the philosophers was not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁴ In any event, by the time that Nietzsche announced ‘the death of God’, it was clear that something important had changed in the forms of life prevailing in the West. Regardless of whether Nietzsche’s actual diagnosis of the change was correct, most contemporary thinkers agree with him that the metaphysical understanding of God is no longer tenable. But several of the most distinguished thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – for example, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Nietzsche himself – held that the loss of belief in a metaphysical God as the ground of all existence and intelligibility, and even the loss of belief in a creator God who produced the heaven and the earth, is not itself a disaster.⁵ These thinkers proposed that the absence of a foundational God opened up access to richer and more relevant ways to understand creation and encounter the spiritual. The death of the philosopher’s God may disclose alternative – perhaps more ‘authentic’?⁶ – possibilities for understanding God, possibilities that were blocked by traditional metaphysical onto-theology.⁷

⁴ “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob – not of the philosophers and of the learned” [*DIEU d’Abraham, DIEU d’Isaac, DIEU de Jacob – non des philosophes et des savants*]. Thus exclaimed Christian philosopher Pascal in his *Memorial* in which he records his overwhelming religious/mystical experience of the night of 23 November 1654 (Pascal 1999, 178). For Martin Buber these words represent Pascal’s change of heart. See *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation between Religion and Philosophy* for Buber’s discussion on God not being susceptible to a “system of thought precisely because He is God. He is beyond each and every one of those systems, absolutely and by virtue of his nature” (Buber 1999, 49). This echoes, of course, insights from the *via negativa* as set out in Chapter Four.

⁵ Nietzsche is generally regarded as having given the account *par excellence* of the origin and consequences of nihilism, deriving from his conception of the death of God. Yet Dostoevsky offers an alternative account in his novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1998 [1879]), locating the cause of nihilism not in the death of God, but in humanity’s understanding of God in relation to the problem of evil. Far from Nietzsche’s representation of God as an exploded fiction, God himself is implicated as the primary source of the evil and suffering that humankind experiences, and the deficit in reasons why, if God is just and benevolent, humanity was ever allowed to suffer at all. Nietzsche’s theory of the will to power stands as a challenge to Dostoevsky’s cautionary axiom, “without God ... All things are permitted” (Dostoevsky 1998, 739). The will to power is simultaneously Nietzsche’s all-inclusive answer to the mysteries of human psychology, and his answer to the question of how one should live. By inverting the consequence of Dostoevsky’s claim that the absence of God entails the absence of any restriction on human behaviour, Nietzsche spins his predictions and hopes for the future of humankind out of the unlimited ‘permission’ granted by nihilism. The absence of God does not precipitate the absolute social and moral ruin of humanity; on the contrary, within the shapeless matter of nihilism lies the means for crafting humanity’s redemption without God, her liberation from empty dichotomies (good and evil, true and false, subject and object, cause and effect), and the possibility for her re-acquaintance with the total potential of the will that has lain dormant, he considers, since the end of Imperial Rome.

⁶ Here I am using ‘authentic’ in the Heideggerian sense of one of two possibilities for being-in-the-world: in/authenticity are not value judgements but modes of being. Inauthenticity is tied up with what Heidegger sees as our comfortable, everyday being-in-the-world. This is the everyday world where we are completely tied up in and absorbed in our familiar everyday tasks and interests. The alternative mode to this is authenticity, a getting away from ‘the they’ [*das Man*], and becoming a self (becoming individualised). Under Heideggerian thinking, for this to occur, Da-sein needs to be brought back from its comfortable absorption in ‘the they’, and come face to face with its “ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (Heidegger 2010a, 182; 2004a, 232).

⁷ As will become increasingly clear throughout this dissertation, I am not here proposing the absence of a foundational God as the basis for a new encounter with the divine and sacred. I am rather proposing a move away from ‘God as centre’ thinking toward a more ethically responsive centrepiece. In order to

In the twentieth century, philosophers in both the analytic and continental traditions became concerned to free philosophical enquiry from the dominance of metaphysics. The oddity of these parallel calls for the overcoming of metaphysics lies in the fact that the analytic and continental camps saw each other as the main culprit in the continuation of the metaphysical modes of enquiry. For the analytic, the error of the metaphysical tradition carried on by continental thinking consisted in striving for an “alleged knowledge of the essence of things which transcends the realm of empirically founded, inductive science” (Carnap 1959, 80). For Heidegger (and the continental philosophers influenced by him), on the other hand, the analytical ‘elimination’ of metaphysics through logical analysis and deference to empirical sciences could only lead to a deeper entanglement in metaphysics. This is because any giving dominance to logical, scientific and mathematical modes of thought is itself, according to Heidegger, the result of a prevailing metaphysical understanding of being. This, of course, is an “alleged knowledge of the essence of things” (Heidegger 1976a, 24) – one in which beings are considered best represented in logical and mathematical terms – as well as a representation which fails to ask about the foundation of this understanding of being. Heidegger believed that a central trait of metaphysical thought is a preoccupation with beings and a failure to ask properly about their being:

As metaphysics, it is by its very essence excluded from the experience of Being; for it always represents beings (ὄν) only with an eye to that aspect of them that has already manifested itself as being (τὸ ὄν). But metaphysics never pays attention to what has concealed itself in this very ὄν insofar as it became unconcealed. (Heidegger 1998a, 228)

In Heidegger’s view, all metaphysical philosophy was essentially oblivious to being; all metaphysics further took the form of onto-theology. This suggests that metaphysics tried to understand the being of everything that is through a simultaneous determination of its essence or most universal trait (the ‘onto’ in ‘onto-theology’). This amounts, Heidegger contends, to a profound confusion, for it tries to understand the transcendental ground of all beings as a transcendent being.⁸ In “The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics”, Heidegger argues that the onto-theological structure of metaphysical enquiry has had deleterious effects on both philosophy and

secure this argument, it is important to trace certain challenges to thinking that Heidegger’s path – and later Derrida’s – make possible. Heidegger’s *destruktive* criticism of theology and metaphysics as onto-theology provides a good place from which to begin this trek. A central issue that will be addressed later in this chapter is understanding the consequences of the (seeming) demise of the metaphysical tradition for thinking about God.

⁸ See Heidegger’s (1991b) “Nihilism as Determined by the History of Being”.

theology (Heidegger 2002, 42-74). It has prevented philosophy from thinking about being as something that is not itself a being, and it has misconstrued the nature of God, obstructing our relationship with the divine.⁹ The connection between ontology and theology, which determines philosophy as onto-theology, was of course also explicitly noted in German Idealism. Recall the clear expression of this in Hegel: “For philosophy, too, has no other object than God – and thus is essentially rational theology – and service to God in its continual service to truth” (Hegel 1975, 101; 1977b, 98). Thus in Hegel, according to Heidegger, ontology becomes the speculatively grounded interpretation of being, in such a way that the actual entity (*Seiendes*) is the absolute *theos*. It is from the being (*Sein*) of the absolute that all entities are determined. Heidegger particularly emphasises philosophy’s interlinking of ontology and theology in his 1936 lecture course on Schelling:

Theo-logy means here questioning beings as a whole. This question of beings as a whole, the theological question, cannot be asked without the question about beings as such, about the essence of being in general. That is the question about the *on hēi on*, “ontology.” Philosophy’s questioning is always and in itself both onto-logical and theo-logical in the very broad sense. Philosophy is Ontotheology. (Heidegger 1985, 51)

Hence, for the later Heidegger,¹⁰ to say that philosophy should not be onto-theological is tantamount to saying that philosophy should not be philosophy. Indeed, in the end Heidegger announces ‘the end of philosophy [as metaphysics or onto-theology] and the task of thinking’ (2008d, 431-449). Whilst it is not within the bounds of this dissertation to give a detailed genealogy of Heidegger’s coming to this announcement, it is crucial that his critique of metaphysics be discussed briefly. However, in order to engage with this critique of metaphysics as a way to rethink and re-enter (some of) the underlying metaphysical assumptions at the heart of monotheism – its claim of/to the One and Only God – I will not read Heidegger directly but rather start with the work of Franz

⁹ It is worth noting that contemporary thinkers are anything but unanimous in their assessment of the details of Heidegger’s critique of onto-theology.

¹⁰ Although it can be misleading to suggest ‘easy’ demarcations of thinkers’ works such as ‘early Derrida’ or ‘later Heidegger’, it is nonetheless a useful marker of transitions in conceptualisation. There can be little doubt as to the differences in Heidegger’s focus in, for example, *Being and Time* (2010a; 2004a) which was originally published in 1927 and translated into English in 1962, and *On the Way to Language* (1982a) which was originally published in 1959 and translated in English in 1971, that go beyond the spectrum of years published. If thinking did not mature, change, evolve, then the task of thinking itself might stall if it commenced at all. See Julian Young’s discussion on Heidegger’s later philosophy and the charge of its lapsing into unintelligible mysticism for an example of, according to Young, a clear demarcation between ‘early’, ‘middle’ and ‘later’ Heidegger (Young 2002). In Chapter Seven, I address some of the issues of demarcating early from later Derrida.

Rosenzweig; in particular, his attempt to use translation as a mode of ontological retrieval. Such a detour will facilitate a productive perambulation with key Heideggerian concepts such as *destruktion* and retrieval, the ontological difference and *aletheia*, each of which will further my genealogical analysis of the irrecusable deconstruction of ontotheological monotheism.

Translation as Ontological Retrieval

Jeder neue Gott schafft neue Sprache. [Each new God creates a new language]
(Gundolf 1930, 9)

The voice of the bible is not to be enclosed in any space—not in the inner sanctum of a church, not in the linguistic sanctum of a people, not in the circle of the heavenly images moving above a nation's sky. Rather this voice seeks again and again to resound from outside—from outside this church, this people, this heaven. It does not keep its sound from echoing in this or that restricted space, but it wants itself to remain free. If somewhere it has become a familiar, customary possession it must again and anew, as a foreign and unfamiliar sound from outside disturb the complacent satedness of its alleged possessor. (Rosenzweig in Buber and Rosenzweig 1994, 56)

In 1924 Rosenzweig began the monumental task of translating the Hebrew Bible into German. A cooperative project between Rosenzweig and Buber, their Bible translation is now widely recognized as one of the most unusual works of German literature. It is also a lesson in the philosophical invention of Jewish identity;¹¹ translating the Bible into German meant re-inventing Jewish origins from the ground up. Every Hebrew patriarch and prophet acquired a new and unfamiliar name; the landscape, once green with vegetation from the Middle East, was now crowded with Germany's native fauna, and even the historical sections now flashed with the 'luster of fables' (*fabelhaft Glanz*). One might argue that the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible thereby aimed to provide readers with a specifically German-Jewish literary past. In this sense, it was an act of literary assimilation, from Hebrew to German. Yet it was simultaneously an act of bold differentiation, a means to dramatise the apparent chasm between contemporary German culture and those ancient Hebrew 'origins' that Jews claimed as their own.

¹¹ In her *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (2014), Judith Butler discusses inventions of Jewish identity through criticisms of the formation of the Jewish state by Rosenzweig and Buber, through to Mara Benjamin.

Buber and Rosenzweig wished to retrieve the Bible from its fallen status as a ‘mere’ text, and to work with and against Martin Luther’s 1534 translation.¹² A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the differences in language used by translators, even when rendered from German into English. In the Buber-Rosenzweig version Abraham nearly sacrifices Isaac upon a ‘slaughter site’ (*Schlachtstatt*); Luther had only asked that Isaac lay himself upon an ‘altar’ (*Altar*). Luther translated the Hebrew word *nabi* as ‘Prophet’; Buber-Rosenzweig instead chose *Künder* (harbingers, or bringers of intelligence). Genesis 2:7, for Luther, has Adam created with the following words: ‘And thus became the man a living soul’ (*Und also ward der Mensch eine lebendige Seele*) whilst the Buber-Rosenzweig translates the Hebrew into German as ‘and the man became living being’ (*und der Mensch ward zum lebenden Wesen*). The difference in language is perhaps most dramatic with the beginning passages of Genesis. Luther’s version is ‘and the Earth was deserted and empty, and there was a shadow upon the deep’ (*und die Erde war wüst und leer, und es war finster auf der Tiefe*). In Buber-Rosenzweig this same passage is rendered as ‘And the Earth was Wild and Waste, Darkness upon the Abyss’ (*Und die Erde war Wirrnis und Wuüste. Finsternis allüber Abgrund*). To place these different translations in their time, in their socio-historical contexts, it is important to remember that the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible appeared as a reaction to Luther’s translation.¹³ Luther’s translation obeyed a principle of identity where it transformed what had once seemed foreign into something customary and familiar. By contrast, the Buber-Rosenzweig translation obeyed what might be called a principle of difference.¹⁴ Each translation – through its use of style, word selection, sentence structure and rhythm – was designed to move the reader in a particular direction (one with ‘simple’, ‘familiar’ language, the other filled with the language of German myth). Rosenzweig wrote that “translation is into the language of the reader and not into the language of the original” (in Buber and Rosenzweig 1994, 49). In this instance, the question is whether only a translation that preserved the sense of unfamiliarity could ensure the intensity, force and timelessness of the original; even

¹² See Lawrence Rosenwald for an historical overview of the controversy surrounding the German translation and the assimilation of Jewish thought into a Teutonic framework in his “On the Reception of Buber and Rosenzweig’s Bible” (1992, 141-165).

¹³ In his “Letter from the Translator”, Luther had announced that he wished to create biblical language “like [that of] the mother in her home, and ... the common man”. For Luther, “speaking proper German” meant this everyday register (1995, 9).

¹⁴ See Mara Benjamin’s (2009) *Rosenzweig’s Bible: Reinventing Scripture for Jewish Modernity*. Benjamin argues that Rosenzweig’s response to modernity was paradoxical in that he challenged his readers to encounter the biblical text as revelation, reinventing scripture – both the Bible itself and the very notion of a scriptural text – in order to invigorate Jewish intellectual and social life, but did so in a distinctly modern key, ultimately reinforcing the foundations of German-Jewish post-Enlightenment liberal thought.

where this requires a creative violation of any number of linguistic conventions (Hebrew, Greek, German, English).

Of all the tasks confronting Rosenzweig and Buber as they began translating the second book of the Hebrew Bible, perhaps none demanded so much philosophical acuity as the selection of the appropriate German forms for God's name. If carried out with sufficient sensitivity – and striving to make the familiar unfamiliar – translation would be no longer a merely philological or aesthetic task. It promised nothing less than escaping Luther's project and restoring to the Bible its 'original' role as a carrier of metaphysical insight. The problem was particularly acute in the third chapter of *Namen* (the translators' title for the second book of the Hebrew Bible, reflecting the Hebrew *Shemot*, or 'Names'). Here a divine voice emanates from the burning bush and commands Moses to convey its message to the Israelites. Moses asks what he shall say if the Israelites inquire who has sent him, and God replies with the Hebrew phrase, *eheye asher eheye*, customarily rendered into English as 'I am that I am'.¹⁵ It is not surprising that this phrase has provoked continuing speculation; in whatever language one writes it, it is recursive (and playful), yet still full of portent. It is arguably the most dramatic theophany of the Bible, God's first and most consequential revelation to humanity. Regarding Luther's translation as their most powerful antecedent, Buber and Rosenzweig were determined to render the phrase in such a way as to make their differences with Luther palpable.¹⁶ Luther's German text (3: 14) reads as follows:

God spoke to Moses: I will be, that which I will be. And said: Thus shall you say to the children of Israel: I will be has sent me to you.¹⁷

Rosenzweig and Buber translated the same passage thus:

¹⁵ There is a long tradition of speculation as to the exact meaning of the words (see, e.g. Vasileiadis 2014). Also see my discussion of the attributes of the "I am that I am" in Chapter Four, 160, of the tetragrammaton in Chapter Seven, 248n31, and of the problem of naming and identity in Chapter Seven, 246-251.

¹⁶ For example, the Hebrew (*ma-sh 'mo*) seems literally to mean 'What is his name?' For this Luther chose the more elegant and idiomatic "*Wie heit sein Name?*" – difficult to paraphrase in English, but generally rendered as "What is he called?" or, more crudely, perhaps, "What is-called his name?" (Luther 1996: "Das 2. Buch Mose"). The difference is significant. If the question concerns what God's name is, God's response would seem to be the answer to this question. That is, God reveals his name. But if the question concerns what Moses should tell the Israelites when they ask after God's name, the response need not be construed as a name at all. Rather, it might be taken as a clarification as to what this name means. This distinction proved to be of great importance for Buber and Rosenzweig. They objected strenuously to Luther's interpretation precisely because they believed he had failed correctly to understand the sense of this exchange. Moses, they insisted, asked not for a what, but *after* a meaning. One could therefore interpret God's response as a clarification of his true ontological status.

¹⁷ From the German: "*Gott sprach zu Mose: Ich werde sein, der ich sein werde. Und sprach: Also sollst du zu den Kindern Israel sagen: Ich werde sein hat mich zu euch gesandt*" (Luther 1996: "Das 3. Buch Mose").

But God spoke to Moses:
 I will be-there, as that which I will be-there.
 And said:
 So shall you say to the Sons of Israel:
 I AM THERE sends me to you.¹⁸

One crucial distinction can be isolated by paying attention to the Tetragrammaton, traditionally understood as a gloss on the Hebrew phrase *eheye asher eheye*. In Luther's version, God responds: "I will be, that which I will be". In the Buber-Rosenzweig version, God says: "I will be-there, as that which I will be-there". The heart of the matter, philosophically as well as philologically, lay in their rejection of Luther's *sein* (to be) and their substitution of the more rarified German verb *dasein* (to exist). In the Buber-Rosenzweig translation, God elaborates upon his answer by decomposing the word "existence" into its particles, "being" and "there" (*da* and *sein*), and for greater emphasis the entire phrase is placed in upper-case: "I AM THERE sends me to you".¹⁹

It is important to note that a proper choice could not be made on philological grounds alone, since the original phrase is grammatically idiosyncratic even according to the conventions of ancient Hebrew (van der Toorn et al. 1999, 910-919). Luther settled for a future tense – 'I will be' (*Ich werde sein*) – while Buber and Rosenzweig decided upon the present – 'I am there' (*Ich bin da*) – although neither response captures the full dimension of the Hebrew.²⁰ It would thus be naïve to suppose that Buber and Rosenzweig had merely selected the most 'accurate' or 'authentic' of terms. Like all translators, they were committing an act of interpretation, and because selection of the proper German term was hardly obvious, their choice of words displayed a specific preference within the range of German-language meanings. The significance of their choice is especially noteworthy since they rejected the claim that the Hebrew

¹⁸ From the German: "Gott aber sprach zu Mosche: Ich werde dasein, als der ich dasein werde. Und sprach: So sollst du zu den Söhnen Jissraels sprechen: ICH BIN DA schickt mich zu euch" (Buber 2007).

¹⁹ The choice of *Dasein* as opposed to *Sein* is also to be found at other moments in the biblical narrative: At *Namen* (Exodus) 4:15, Luther rendered the phrase thus: "You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth. And I will be with thy mouth, and his and will teach you what ye shall do" (Luther 1996: "Das 4. Buch Mose"). Rosenzweig suggests instead: "Then talk to him, put words in his mouth! I'll be there with your mouth and with his mouth, and show you what to do" (in Buber and Rosenzweig 1994). One crucial difference here is once again '*dasein*' as against '*sein*.' Significantly, the substitution was apparently a matter of course at this point; the initial decision had been made the theophany at the burning bush. In his working papers for the translation, Rosenzweig's commentary on *Namen* 4:15 does not even address the transformation of '*sein*' into '*dasein*', suggesting that he and Buber had resolved the philosophical intricacies of the problem already at 3:13-14 (Rosenzweig 2000).

²⁰ In Hebrew, *eheye* is future in its form (or imperfect in 'aspect'), but uncertain in its modality. Notice also that the Hebrew *asher* that connects the two verbs itself suffers a critical ambiguity of meaning: It can mean both 'that' and 'where'. See, for example, Ruth 1:16, where Ruth says to Naomi, "for wherever [*asher*] thou goest, I will go". Buber and Rosenzweig's '*da*' in the verb '*dasein*' may have been an attempt to capture this more rare locative sense, though none of their papers confirms this possibility. I would like to thank James Trotter (Murdoch University) for helpful discussions on grammatical issues.

phrase is simply a proper name: had they considered God's utterance as a name, one might have expected them to have translated God's response much as they translated other 'names' in the Hebrew Bible, that is, by means of mimetic transliteration.²¹

In distinguishing between name and meaning, Rosenzweig and Buber relied upon a ground-breaking article by the biblical philologist Benno Jacob, "Moses at the Burning Bush" (1922).²² According to Benno Jacob, the Hebrew verbal particle *eheye* "is not a mere copula" but in itself expresses "power and meaning" (B. Jacob in Albertini 1999, 22). God's response was best understood as a condensed explanation of the ontological status of the divine. But, under Benno Jacob's interpretation, the response held two distinct meanings. On the one hand, it revealed God as an existent being who is fully 'there' in the sense of 'being-there': '*Da-Sein*' as hyphenated in Jacob's text. On the other hand, it also indicated God as the unique Being (*Seiende*), the very ground and origin of the world.²³ Since Jacob provided philological evidence for both interpretations, it is intriguing that Buber and Rosenzweig chose only the first – *dasein* as against *sein*.

Translation and Interpretation: Heidegger's Retelling

Religious and ontological speculation are distinct; it would be facile to translate between 'God' and 'Being'. However it is worth noting that, while distinct and untranslatable, 'temporality' for both conceptions marks an ultimate horizon of meaning. Rosenzweig, for example, defined redemption as that condition where the

²¹ The mimetic alternative was important for their translation. In reproducing the names of virtually all of the human characters in the biblical story, Rosenzweig and Buber settled upon transliterating as closely as possible the sounds of the Hebrew. This method resulted in names that would have looked foreign to the German reader who felt accustomed to the Lutheran spellings: Where Luther had written 'Isaak', they wrote 'Jizchak', for 'Josua' they wrote 'Jehoschua'. But when it came to rendering God's response, mimesis was not an option. To write the sound of God's response would only make sense if they had considered it a proper name or an acoustic event to be recorded as closely as possible in the textures of a foreign alphabet.

²² As Benno Jacob explained, "If a substantive follows after *ma* [what], this is never a question as to the name of the substantive which one does not know – for how could one then have pronounced it already?" Rather, it asks after the "*sense and meaning* [*Sinn und Bedeutung*]" of the name (1922, 32; emphasis in original). Following Jacob, then, it was a question of interpretation, not naming as such (see Rothschild 2007, 25).

²³ To clarify this point Benno Jacob partitioned the word as *Da-Sein*, to stress God's existence after the Latin sense of *existere*, which itself can be broken into German, as *Ek-sistenz* (standing-out, or being-there). The Hebrew *haya*, he explained, "is essentially the 'being-there [*Da-Sein*]' of that which is connected to nothing before it". It is therefore the true word for the first act of Creation: "God said, Let there be light! [*Licht sei!*] and light was there! [*Licht war da!*]" The Hebrew verb 'to be' thus indicated that "every happening is a miracle, an unmediated springing forth of Being from Not-Being [*ein unvermittelter Sprung aus dem Nicht-Sein ins Sein*]" (B. Jacob 1992, 132).

Eternal itself has become “like Time” (Rosenzweig 1985, 324). And, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger suggested that what reveals itself as the horizon of Being is time (Heidegger 2004a, 488). For both Rosenzweig and Heidegger, since the dream of detemporalising metaphysics was done, the claim that something ‘is’ amounts to the claim that it is temporal. Naturally, this lesson must then apply *a fortiori* (by an even greater force of logic) to those objects that philosophers once considered the grounds of metaphysics, whether these are ‘God’, ‘Being’, or ‘the Eternal’. But what remains that might distinguish theology from ontology if both are identical with time? For Heidegger, translation is a force that may either destroy or recuperate ontological insight (Heidegger 1995, 25-26; 1987, 13). And Heidegger, too, believed that, for the most part, the history of western understanding is one of linguistic deformation and forgetting. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* he argued, for instance, that the translation of key philosophical terms from Greek to Latin was not “accidental and harmless” (Heidegger 1987, 13). Rather it marked “the first stage in the process by which we cut ourselves off and alienated ourselves from the original essence of Greek philosophy” (ibid.). Nevertheless, mistranslation for Heidegger is not simply a fatal turning point in meaning. The divergence of a translation from its original sense is both a linguistic and a metaphysical event: it not only represents a failure in understanding, it also warps the very texture of Being.

Correct translation, for Heidegger, is a metaphysical retrieval²⁴ – an act of anamnesis or remembrance. Broadly put, one might say that Heidegger regarded language not simply as a tool of expression but as the horizon in which the world is revealed.²⁵ It is instructive in this regard to note the kinship between the biblical concept of revelation (*Offenbarung*) and the Greek notion of *Aletheia* (truth as unconcealment), terms that Heidegger argues have been used almost interchangeably. In the 1929 essay “On The Essence of Truth”, for example, he examines the close association between ‘revealing’ (*Offenbarmachung*) and ‘disclosure’ (*Entdeckung*) (Heidegger 2008c).²⁶ The

²⁴ Heidegger’s inability to escape the metaphysical traces completely in his own thought has been much discussed in critical literature. His later rejection of *Being and Time* as ‘too Kierkegaardian’ suggests that he at least came to recognize the fundamentally theological grounding of the category of authenticity. For a related argument, see Derrida, “*Ousia* and *grammē*: Note on a note from *Being and Time*” (1982c, 29-67). Elsewhere Derrida argues that “Heideggerian thinking often consists, notably in *Being and Time*, in repeating on an ontological level Christian themes and texts that have been ‘de-Christianized’” (Derrida 1995a, 23).

²⁵ Heidegger thus wrote: “But now let us skip over this whole process of deformation and decay and attempt to regain the unimpaired strength of language and words; for words and language are not wrappings in which things are packed for the commerce of those who write and speak. It is in words and language that things first come into being and are” (Heidegger 1987, 13).

²⁶ Also see Heidegger’s “On the Essence of Ground” in *Pathmarks* (1998b, 97-135).

misunderstanding of *Aletheia* Heidegger diagnosed, however, itself is partly a problem of translation:

Thus to the λόγος belongs unhiddenness—ἀ-λήθεια. To translate this word as ‘truth’, and, above all, to define this expression conceptually in theoretical ways, is to cover up the meaning of what the Greeks made ‘self-evidently’ basic for the terminological use of ἀλήθεια as a pre-philosophical way of understanding it. (Heidegger 2004a, 262)

Although it would be too hasty to simply equate the Greek notion of disclosure with the biblical concept of revelation, it is striking how close these concepts are in Heidegger’s argument that there was an ‘original’ sense to the phenomenon (of disclosure) called ‘unhiddenness’ that was subsequently ‘covered up’ in the course of the intervening millennia.²⁷ Both revelation (*Offenbarung*) and announcement (*Offenbarmachung*) are primal kinds of “unhiddenness” (*Unverborgenheit*) although one derives from the Bible and the other from a fragment of Heraclitus, described by Heidegger as “the oldest of philosophical treatises” (ibid.).

For Heidegger, however, the problem of ‘disclosure’ is not simply one example of mistaken translation among others. Disclosure is both a mode of understanding that must be rescued from the philosophical tradition gone astray and the method of translation necessary for this retrieval. As Jan Aler has argued, Heidegger’s use of language is animated by a single purpose: “to unveil original meanings, to bring the past to life again, and to free once more the forces that have produced the past” (Aler 1972, 42). Contending that his insistence on recuperating the original sense of words stays clear of “uninhibited word mysticism”; Heidegger nonetheless argues that “the ultimate business of philosophy is to preserve the *force of the most elemental words* in which Dasein expresses itself” (Heidegger 2010a, 262). These ‘most elemental words’ belong to a ‘primordial’ understanding – in the sense of being prior to the present, but also in the sense of being prior to ‘deformation and decay’. Thus the “unimpaired strength of language and words” can only be disclosed by means of translations that necessarily do violence to our customary understanding. Heidegger believed that returning to Greek origins – a project that must always remain incomplete, in process – demands an overcoming, although not an erasure, of the past. This explains Heidegger’s paradoxical

²⁷ In addition to the *Being and Time* passages referenced in-text, also see; *Being and Truth* (2010b, 89); *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)* (2012, 92, 186, 337, 379); *Logic: The Question of Truth* (2010c, 121, 126-27, 158); *Poetry, Language and Thought* (2001, 220-24). See also Walter Brogan’s (2005) *Heidegger and Being: The Twofoldness of Being*, Chapter One, “Martin Heidegger’s Relationship with Aristotle”, in particular.

requirement that one may discover the forgotten sources only by means of a “destruktion of tradition”.²⁸

This paradoxical requirement of a/the ‘destruktion of tradition’ in Heidegger’s work may arguably facilitate a better understanding of the ontological questions regarding naming raised in the Bible. Heidegger, who edited a volume of Husserl’s lectures on time, never explicitly criticises his mentor’s approach, but he must have seen it as derivative and limited; the temporality of observation presupposes the deeper temporality of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. In the name of retrieving temporality, Heidegger deconstructs traditional ontology. This deconstruction can help us untangle certain conundrums about time and being, and, by extension, the priority given to God under One and Only thinking. For example, philosophers have often asked whether time itself exists: it seems to consist of what is no longer, what is not yet, and what is only for an infinitesimal instant (Aristotle 1984b, 1034-1038 [*Physics*, 4.10]; Augustine 1912, 236-238 [*Confessions*, 11.14]). Heidegger’s approach “show[s] on the basis of ‘time’ that this kind of question cannot be asked anymore” (Heidegger 2011, 51). When we ask whether time ‘exists’ or ‘is’ or indeed when we ask whether God ‘exists’ or ‘is’, we presuppose some understanding of being – and, as discussed earlier, almost inevitably we understand presence as the primary or central sense of being (Heidegger 2011, 86; 2004a, 46-49). However, if Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is correct, our access to presence is itself made possible by time. Time, then, under such a construal, cannot be subordinated to presence because time itself makes presence meaningful.

Heidegger’s temporal deconstruction of traditional ontology is hence not a demolition, rather bringing out the limited validity of the tradition, indicating thereby another aporia.²⁹ An ontology of presence has its legitimate scope as “an ontology of the world in which every Dasein is” (Heidegger 2011, 88); that is, it illuminates the present-at-hand entities within this world. What it is unable to illuminate is Dasein’s own temporality and historicity. Heidegger leaves us with no final panacea, rather generating fresh concepts and new questions. Among many, we can mention the problem of how to conceive of God once traditional notions of time and being have been exposed to the Heideggerian critiques. Platonism, after all, is a powerful factor in traditional theology, and monotheists may find it almost impossible to understand their religion except in relation to a timeless presence. Heidegger’s thought suggests the perhaps refreshing,

²⁸ On *destruktion*, see especially “The Task of Destroying the History of Ontology” in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 2004a, 41-79). Also see Werner Marx’s (1971) *Heidegger and the Tradition*.

²⁹ Indeed Jean-Luc Marion argues that far from striving to eradicate metaphysics, Heidegger laboured to bring forth “a meta-metaphysics” (1997, 283; original emphasis).

perhaps troubling, alternative of thinking of a god as an event: “passing by” may be precisely how the gods are present (cf. Heidegger 2014, 101).³⁰ It may be that our deepest ‘destiny’ – following the trajectory set by the German word *Geschick* – does not return us to a divine eternity, instead awakening us to the opening of a distancing from the divine: a distance that might allow for a different (ethical) configuration of biblical texts and monotheism.

Ereignis is not Another Name for Being

The development of the abundance of the transformations of Being looks at first like a history of Being. But Being does not have a history in the way in which a city or a people have their history. What is history-like in the history of Being is obviously determined by the way in which Being takes place and by this alone ... this means the way in which It gives Being [*Es Sein gibt*]. (Heidegger 1972, 8)

The short lecture ‘Time and Being’, in which this dense passage is found, contains Heidegger’s final attempt to address, in a sustained and explicit manner, a central topic of his thinking:³¹ What are we to make of a history that is not historical in the way that all other histories are considered historical?³² In its unique way of being historical, the history of being remains unlike every other history and breaks somehow with the entire class of histories. Heidegger is clear: if we want to achieve what he calls here a determination of the uniquely historical character of the history of being, we must attend to the way in which being happens in its utter singularity. And this means, he says, as a giving or a sending, or even as ‘destiny’ (*Geschick*).³³ How are these statements to be understood? Strictly speaking, it is not appropriate to say that being *is*, since such a formulation only reverts to the language of being itself. To say that being *is*

³⁰ To give Heidegger in full: “To pass does not here mean to perish, but rather to pass by, not to remain there constantly present, i.e., thought in terms of the issue, to presence is something that has been, to come to presence is a coming that presses upon us” (Heidegger 2014, 101).

³¹ A summary of the development of ‘the history of being’ in Heidegger’s thinking would have to consider at the very least the discussion of ‘historicity’ as it emerges towards the end of *Being and Time* (in which the disclosure of being is said to be historical), as well as the prolonged engagement with the history of metaphysics throughout the 1920s and 1930s, especially as it is dealt with in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1987) and in *Contributions to Philosophy (of the event)* (2012), as this leads to his first thorough elaboration of the thought of the history of being in the second volume of Heidegger’s *Nietzsche* (see Heidegger 1991b, 199–250).

³² Keeping in mind that the history of the Judeo-Christian God has a particularly sacred kind of historical grounding in western thinking.

³³ It is important to note the verbal affinity between ‘sending’ (*Schicken*) and ‘destiny’ (*Geschick*) which is lost in the English translation.

assumes in advance what must not be taken for granted, and thus again passes by what still needs to be thought.³⁴ Heidegger asks instead that we think the way in which ‘it gives’ being. Here he exploits the sense of a German idiom that is without exception rendered in English as ‘there is’, but can also be heard, if one attends to its literal sense, to speak of a giving.³⁵ Near the end of this lecture on “Time and Being” Heidegger offers a word for such a giving: *Ereignis*. This word may be translated for now as “the event of Appropriation” or as “enowning”, as long as such translations are taken with enough indeterminacy to let the matter show itself in a way appropriate to it (Heidegger 1972, 19). What is thus important is to find a way to describe appropriation appropriately. At the same time, however, it is not insignificant that in the attempt to describe the experience of appropriation appropriately we already find ourselves caught up in the language of appropriation. Yet, if we are to experience the uniquely historical character of Being, Heidegger is clear that the way leads to *Ereignis*: “the sole purpose of this lecture was to bring before our eyes Being itself as the event of Appropriation” (Heidegger 1972, 21). *Ereignis* is here not offered as another name for Being, another attempt to say what Being is. Rather, in the encounter with Being as *Ereignis*, what emerges is the belonging together of Being and time (Heidegger 1972, 19).

That the task of achieving a determination of the historical character of Being would call for a transformation or an estranging of our ‘ordinary sense’ of history and time should come as no surprise, particularly if we consider that in the Foreword to “Time and Being” Heidegger emphasises that we should expect great difficulties in understanding him. We are warned that a thoughtful encounter with the lecture demands somehow placing in abeyance our prevailing expectations with regard to how we might receive what he has to say. This difficulty concerning our reception of Heidegger does not have to do primarily with the conceptual complexities of his thinking, nor does it simply concern his exploiting and twisting ordinary words. Rather it is connected to the task introduced above: namely, the difficulty of determining the history of being solely from the way being happens as a giving or destiny. Heidegger’s warning also implies

³⁴ It may be useful here to recall the difficulties associated with the attributes assigned to God under cosmological, teleological and ontological arguments where, for example, to claim that God is benevolent causes no end of difficulty in relation to the existence of suffering and the concepts of love and justice.

³⁵ The verb in the German idiom, ‘*es gibt ...*’ is *geben*, which means ‘to give’. The idiom appears in German in situations where in English one says ‘there is ...’, for example when one says ‘there is water in the lake’ or ‘there are criminals in the government’. In the protocol to the seminar following the lecture “Time and Being”, Heidegger clarifies how the giving spoken of in *es gibt* opens up a host of relations and, in particular, tells us that this suggests an availability to humans for a possible appropriation. The ‘it’ in question here and the sense of the ‘giving’, of course, still need elaboration, no less than the sense of appropriation (Heidegger 1972, 38-40). Later, both Derrida and Caputo extend the Heideggerian conceptions of ‘gift’ and ‘event’ in their work.

that our expectations carry a certain inevitability, however inappropriate they may be to the matter at hand. One implication is that we are caught up in these expectations, and they cannot simply be dispensed with, or ejected by edict. This point alone should give us pause. If addressing the history of being is a possibility at odds with customary or traditional expectations (of theology, of philosophy), then such a task cannot be isolated from the way in which it *already* finds itself situated in a time and place. Our ability to be receptive to Heidegger's thinking, in other words, is already framed or conditioned by a metaphysical lineage that we have inherited but not chosen, just as our ability to think 'God' is already framed or conditioned by a metaphysical lineage that we have inherited but not chosen. This means that before history and being can be taken up as questions in an explicit way, the very posing of these questions finds itself claimed by history, caught within history. What does such a situation, as historical, have to do with the history of being as it would twist free from ordinary history?

This point in Heidegger's lecture, as it owns up to operating within certain inescapable hermeneutic prejudices, is presented initially as an obstacle or as a hindrance to our understanding, insofar as we are asked to prepare ourselves to move beyond the limits it would otherwise impose. In attempting to overturn or dismantle our historical prejudices, the lecture thus seeks to enact what Heidegger designates as a *destruktion* or, perhaps better, a 'de-structuring' of the metaphysical tradition.³⁶ In doing so, however, it seeks to direct us to something entirely unanticipated and unheard of. Transformation into the estranging sense of the history of being thus calls for a destruction that would reveal how history, ordinarily taken, covers over and obscures being as a giving, sending or destiny: "Only the gradual removal of these obscuring covers—that is what is meant by 'dismantling'—procures for thinking a preliminary insight into what then reveals itself as the destiny of Being" (Heidegger 1972, 9). This strange glimpse of destiny or history does not, however, emerge from a place that is simply external to our situation, any more than the shared horizons of understanding can be viewed simply as limits, or mere deficiencies. If the operative limits of our understanding can be surpassed or broken apart, this occurs first of all by accepting them as they unavoidably impose themselves upon the hermeneutic situation and grant a starting-point to the lecture.³⁷ As limits they can thus be grasped as positive and

³⁶ I flagged my intention to draw on Heidegger's *destruktion* in my Introduction 30, and in Chapter Five 194 and this chapter 201, 208n28 ff.

³⁷ Each discourse already hides in itself one definite interpretation of what it articulates, an interpretation which is usually so unobtrusive that it remains unnoticed: "The project of understanding has its own possibility of development. We shall call the development of understanding *interpretation* [*Auslegung*]. In interpretation understanding appropriates what it has understood understandingly. In interpretation

enabling because they are already related to the possible appearance of something else, something other. The task of achieving a determination of *Ereignis* as it reveals the history of being can be said, then, to be one of dismantling or breaking down the limits of philosophy as metaphysics in order to make available what is harboured within such limits. The history of being lies concealed within a history that *already* claims us. That is to say, we are already situated in a history of thought deeply inscribed by Judeo-Christian conceptions (about the One and Only God, about singularity, and sovereignty), even if we should resist them with a recognition of their historical situatedness. Thus although on the one hand the appearance of the history of being breaks with what first began as the history of metaphysics, on the other hand this first beginning also already belongs to another beginning as it remains concealed in the first beginning (the retrieval) (Heidegger 1999a).³⁸ Metaphysics is a history caught in the ‘oblivion’ or forgetting of being.

Thinking the history of being exposes this oblivion or concealment as a certain failure, but not in order to remove the concealment. In the protocol to the seminar that followed the lecture “Time and Being”, it is made clear that the heretofore forgetting of being is not itself to be overcome or negated. The forgetting is not to be surpassed by a recovery of something forgotten; “the previous non-thinking is not a neglect, but is to be thought as something that follows from the self-concealing of being” (Heidegger 1972, 29-30). It follows that the ‘forgetting’ of other deities or the covering up of textual remnants via translation or redaction is also to be overcome or negated in the traditional sense. Merely pointing to the problematic translation of ‘God’ for ‘El/Elohim’ or ‘LORD’ for ‘YHWH’, or reframing Asherah (consort of Yahweh) into the cultic objects ‘Asherim’, does not somehow (re)cover what has been forgotten (from living memory, erased from records, palimpsestuously covered over with other writing, with other names). What, then, might *Ereignis* offer in this case? What is at stake, I suggest, when drawing on *Ereignis* in this context (of offering a genealogy), is perhaps the apparentness of aporias within/of monotheistic claims to the One and Only God. Under a Heideggerian torch, it thus might be possible to (re)trace the un-concealing of an inescapable concealment.

understanding does not become something different, but rather itself” (Heidegger 2010a, 144). Compare the Macquarrie and Robinson’s translation: “The projecting of the understanding has its own possibility—that of developing itself [sich auszubilden]. This development of understanding we call “interpretation”. In it the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it” (Heidegger 2004a, 188). Also see Heidegger’s critique of the “‘circle’ in understanding” (Heidegger 2004a, 363).

³⁸ In *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, Heidegger offers an extended treatment of this relation between the first and other beginning (Heidegger 1999a, 125-30).

The history of being emerges only when we become attentive to the oblivion as such, when we begin to think in the oblivion and attend to it thoughtfully. At the same time, it becomes clear that thinking in this way does not attempt to offer merely another account of history. In attempting the de-structuring that would open up the granting of being itself – or being as *Ereignis* – by exposing the oblivion, such thinking also prepares itself for an actual historical transformation. This transformation entails nothing less than the ending of philosophy in an exhaustion of the metaphysical project that has sought to say what being is. The task of thinking emerges in the ending of philosophy. And yet our relation to this possible transformation remains merely preparatory; it is not to be regarded as new founding (Heidegger 1972, 60). Strictly speaking, one may not undertake to ‘produce’ the transformation; any attempt at enacting such a *poiēsis* must already rely on an interpretation of being that once again reverts to the legacy of metaphysics. Production is only possible in the anticipation of what is to be produced and thus such anticipation is always first of all grounded in the being of what is to be produced (45-46).

Another question arises: how can being itself, or being as such, be historical? Thinking the history and happening of being as a giving, or as *Ereignis*, is a matter of thinking an origination or an event in such a way that the iteration of being itself – as the being of beings or as the ground of beings – is not already taken for granted.³⁹ Certainly, the passage cited earlier at the commencement of this section entitled ‘Ereignis is not Another Name for Being’ – from Heidegger’s *On Time and Being* (1972) – does tell us that we are concerned with an unfolding and that this unfolding does look at first like a history because it involves an abundance of transformations. Heidegger is referring here to the history of western thinking as a lineage of attempts to name being as presence, and, arguably, Heidegger’s philosophical career is devoted to elaborating and carefully questioning this lineage. In the texts published along with “Time and Being”, and within the lecture itself, we find several passages that chronicle the metaphysical determinations that have prevailed. The names offered include, among others, the Greek *hen* of Parmenides, the Platonic/Aristotelian *logos*, Aristotle’s *energeia* and medieval *actualitas*, the monad of Leibniz, Kant’s transcendental making possible of objectivity, Hegel’s dialectical mediation of absolute spirit, Marx’s historical process of production and Nietzsche’s will to power.⁴⁰ Given that such lists

³⁹ This is the precise difficulty Heidegger confronts in his attempt to think being ‘itself’ or ‘as such’. “To think being itself appropriately requires us to relinquish being as the ground of beings in favor of the giving which prevails concealed in unconcealment, that is in favor of the It gives” (Heidegger 1972, 6).

⁴⁰ This is not an exhaustive list but serves to trace the arc(he) of western thought.

refer in compressed form to the scope of western thinking, it is not possible to overstate the simplification that is enacted through the mere rehearsing of these names.

Nevertheless, the history of being does not show itself immediately in such a history of the naming of being. This is why Heidegger says that the transformations only look at first like a history of being. The history of being does not show itself at all in the unfolding of these transformations, unless one attends to the withdrawal of being as it becomes manifest in the transformations, which is to say, unless one sees what remains hidden in the giving or sending of being. Similarly, the ‘history’ of God as One and Only, does not unfold as the reader of the text moves from passage to passage or from book to book, unless the reader attends to the withdrawal of deities and their functions (as such changes become manifest), which is to say, unless the reader looks for what remains hidden. What appears in biblical literature (and in the Bible as history, and in theology) is hence absence, the absence of other voices: Hittites, Amorites, women, Egyptians, and other deities. Biblical history and, indeed, the literary remnants of the edited/redacted texts, have in many instances been re-worked to establish a totalizing name (think here of the post-exilic writers’ calls for exclusivity examined in Chapters One and Two). This names a singular, male deity, a One and Only God that operates as the ground of what is. Yet what is decisive is that every such name (that is to say, such a *reading* of name, such an *inscribing* of name), also obliterates or obscures a remainder (e.g. Asherah, Baal, Elohim, Pharaoh, Jael), and, precisely as the totalising and grounding name that it presumes to be, it must leave this remainder unthought.

Only in deconstructing do transformations make evident an oblivion of being that is not said in the names themselves, and thus point to the *Ereignis* character of being as a sending that withdraws. The sending and the withdrawal do not occur as two distinct moments.⁴¹ What appears in the history of metaphysics, then, is itself an absence. It is in this precise sense that Heidegger speaks of the ‘epochs’ of the history of being: each epoch established through a totalising name for the ground of what is, with every such name also obliterating or obscuring a remainder or an abyss. Precisely as the totalising and grounding name that it presumes to be, it must leave this remainder or abyss

⁴¹ In *The Principle of Reason* Heidegger writes: “In the destiny of being the history of being is not thought from the point of view of a happening that can be discerned through a movement and process. Rather the essence of the history of being is determined from out of the destiny of being, from out of being as destiny, from out of that which sends itself to us insofar as it withdraws itself from us. Both the self-sending and the self-withdrawing are one and the same, not twofold ... Talk of the sending of being is not an answer but rather a question, among others the question concerning the essence of history, inasmuch as we think history as being and think essence from out of being. Initially the historical character of being is most bewildering ...” (Heidegger 1991c, 62).

unthought. This necessity is precisely what is meant by the destiny of the being.⁴² The word ‘epoch’ in this context hence does not refer only to an era in which a certain name for being holds sway; rather, if one hears the original Greek sense of *epoche*, the epochs of being refer also to a withholding that holds sway throughout the history of metaphysics.⁴³ The epochal transformations of the history of being show that in each attempt to name being, to say what it is as the ground of beings, being itself undergoes an erasure or falls into oblivion. In other words, being as such remains unthought within the epochs, insofar as what defines an epoch is its singular way of taking being for granted as presence, as something already given, as the being of beings. The different names for being – precisely in their difference – all have in common, then, this distinctive trait, namely, that they enact a covering over of the retreat in the becoming manifest of being as ground. As a history, then, it can be said that being – or indeed monotheism – shows itself as ground only by hiding itself as a groundless sending from nowhere.

Destruktion is Heidegger’s name for the method through which he reads the past history of Western philosophy, a method that can loosely be understood as comprising two different strategies that will become increasingly important to this dissertation. It may be helpful to think of these as positive and negative strategies although to so describe and differentiate them is itself problematic. The ‘negative’ strategy of *destruaktion* seeks to demonstrate how history has distorted the meaning of Being.⁴⁴ The ‘positive’ strategy demonstrates how such a meaning can also be retrieved from the margins of the same history.⁴⁵ Of additional significance for this chapter is the pathway

⁴² “The history of Western thinking for its part must then give pointers which, if we were to follow them, would grant us a bit of a glimpse, even if still obscure, into what is here called the history of being. The history of being is the destiny of being, that sends itself to us insofar as it withdraws its essence” (Heidegger 1991c, 61).

⁴³ “The history of being means the destiny of being; in such sendings both the sending as well as that which sends withhold themselves in the announcement of themselves. To withhold oneself in Greek is *epoche*. Hence the talk of the epochs of the destining of being ...” (Heidegger 1972, 9).

⁴⁴ Some philosophers deny that a concept ‘being’ has any meaning at all, since we only define an object’s existence by its relation to other objects, and action it undertakes. The term ‘I am’ has no meaning by itself: it must have an action or relation appended to it. The implications that this ‘relational’ thinking has, for example, on the Shema (*ehyeh asher ehyeh*), or indeed for how one is to think of ‘the subject’, are profound, and will be examined in closer detail later in this chapter.

⁴⁵ The language of the ‘margin’ offers a productive place from which to further destabilise traditions centred on totalitarian thinking. The margin denotes the edge or border of something. In the case of the post-structuralist thinking I am concerned with, margins denote liminal spaces where dominant discourses have pushed otherness and alterity outward. This outward pushing, the resultant marginalisation and exclusions are instantiations of a textual violence that has occurred (and continues to occur) against any number of ‘misfits’: women, Egyptians, foreigners, other gods. However, the act of marking off a margin, of exclusion zones and rituals used to ‘solidify’ borders leaves a/the trace of the marginalised. It is to these margins of the biblical texts I will shortly go. This process of retrieval from the margins will also feature more prominently in my later engagement with Derrida’s expansion of the methodology that the Heideggerian pathway opens up for thinking.

opened up by Heidegger's concept of "ontological difference" (*die ontologische Differenz*) which he uses to mark the distinction between Being (*das Sein*) and the beings of entities (*das Seiende*) (Heidegger 1982b, 22).

Ontological Difference and the Question of Naming: Exodus 3:11-4:17

In the first three chapters, one of the points that has become clear is that the Hebrew Bible (and its complex history of transmission, translation and interpretation) reflects an intense preoccupation with language. Indeed, from the very beginning, the 'word' is at the centre of the Biblical story: God's first recorded act in Genesis is to speak and thus to bring the world into existence (Gen 1:3). Following each successive act of creation, Biblical authors pause emphatically to note what God "called" his different creations (e.g. Gen 1:5, 8). After creating the One and Only being with the capacity to use language – in a repetition of the logic of the One and Only God – God calls upon Adam to "name" each species of animal over which he will rule (Gen 2:19). The Tower of Babel narrative, which investigates human beings' attempt to become like God, propounds that in the end they are reduced to their 'proper place' by having their language "confounded" (Gen 11:9). In the pivotal first revelation to Moses at the Burning Bush, much of the conversation is concerned with the question of what Moses should answer when the Israelites ask for God's name (Ex 3:13).⁴⁶

Buber and Rosenzweig regarded God's self-disclosure to Moses as a philosophical lesson: Moses received not God's *name* but rather his name's *ontological* meaning. Rosenzweig summarised the meaning of this name as 'I shall exist' (*Ich werde dasein*) and, in a longer essay on Moses Mendelssohn's biblical translation, as 'for-you-and-by-you-existence and becoming-existence' (*Für-euch-und Bei-euch-dasein und dasein-werden*). Rosenzweig's emphasis falls not on an everlasting being of

⁴⁶ Kenneth Burke (1970) is not far from the mark when he engages in a bit of wordplay at the beginning of his *Rhetoric of Religion*: he observes that theology, or "words about God", can be read as "logology" or "words about words" (1970, vi). Indeed, some have argued that in the case of the Hebrew Bible the connection is even closer and that the human being's relationship to God is enacted through the human being's relationship to language, that biblical theology is essentially a 'logology'. Of course Burke is not the first to suggest this connection. See John's logological reading of the Genesis cosmology with "In the beginning was the word ..." (John 1:1). On whatever level one might interpret the narrative of John in the Christian Bible, it seems clear that he finds a profound significance in God creating the world through the use of language – that *before* the world, and leading to its existence, was language. For lively criticism of Burke's work see William Rueckert's (1969) *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke, 1924-1966*. For example, "Kenneth Burke's *The Rhetoric of Religion*, like everything else that Mr. Burke has written, is highly original, brilliantly stimulating, infinitely suggestive, and ultimately baffling" (Rueckert 1969, 401).

God but on his eternal presentness – a theme that also resounds in much of Jewish philosophy and theology. For example, Maimonides⁴⁷ sees the Tetragrammaton as an indication that God is to be identified with being and nothing else. To follow this line of thinking means that our understanding of the relationship between God and the world must be explicated in purely formal terms. What terms are these? For Jewish philosophers such as Maimonides, Buber and Rosenzweig, they relate to the transcendent characteristics of (ascribed to) God. For example, in his translation of the Bible into German prior to the Buber-Rosenzweig translation, Moses Mendelssohn presents Exodus 3:14 as:

God said to Moses, “I am the being which is eternal”. He said that this means, “This is what you should say to the children of Israel: ‘The eternal being, which calls itself “I am eternal” has sent me to you.’” (in Buber and Rosenzweig 1994, 102)

In his discussion of this translation in his essay “The Eternal: Mendelssohn and The Name of God”, Rosenzweig congratulates Mendelssohn for capturing (or attempting to capture) in one phrase God’s providence, eternity, and necessary existence (Buber and Rosenzweig 1994). Yet identifying God with eternal being can be something of an evasion. Buber translates God’s proper name as “He-is-there” (Buber 1980, 67), and Rosenzweig translates the passage in this way:

And God said to Moses: I shall be present, as I shall be present. And he said: You should say to the children of Israel, I AM PRESENT sent me to you. (Rosenzweig 1984, 804)

The emphasis which Rosenzweig seems to bring out here is not on the everlasting being of God but his eternal presentness. For Rosenzweig, then, the relation between God and humanity is one of ontological co-determination: God becomes fully what he is (or will be) only in relation to humanity, and vice versa. In *What is Called Thinking?* (1976b), Heidegger similarly observed that “[e]very philosophical—that is, thoughtful—doctrine of man’s essential nature is *in itself alone* a doctrine of the Being of beings [*Sein des Seienden*]” (Heidegger 2004a, 79). Conversely, “[e]very doctrine of Being is *in itself alone* a doctrine of man’s essential nature” (ibid.). Although I cannot

⁴⁷ Moses Maimonides is one of the most influential and prolific Torah scholars of the Middle Ages. Born Mosheh ben Maimon, he was also known as Musa ibn Mayun and Rambam (from the Hebrew acronym for *Rabbeinu Moseh Ben Maimon*). For discussion of Maimonides’ scholarship, see, for instance, David Hartman’s (1977) *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest*.

claim that Heidegger's interpretation of Being is the same as Rosenzweig's interpretation of God, the point is that in relation to the human sphere, Being and God exhibit a similar correlation with human existence. This similarity is furthered when Heidegger writes:

We ask what the relation is between man's nature and the Being of beings. But, as soon as I thoughtfully say, "man's nature," I have already said relatedness to Being. Likewise, as soon as I say thoughtfully: Being of beings, the relatedness to man's nature has been named. Each of the two members of the relation between man's nature and Being already implies the relation itself. (Heidegger 2004a, 79)

For Rosenzweig, as for Heidegger, a 'proper' understanding of this relation poses the single greatest burden for thinking. This is why the 'correct' translation of God's name seemed to Rosenzweig a matter of such overwhelming importance. God's Being had to be conceived in such a way as to enable his correlation with humanity.⁴⁸ In one respect, it is the 'question' itself that first forges the relation: God calls to Moses, Moses asks after God's name, and it is in the circle of questions between them that they both become what they are.⁴⁹ Heidegger, too, contended that the bond between Dasein and Being is first implied by Dasein being by nature "the being that questions" (Heidegger, 2004a, 23-24, 31ff). Just to be clear, for Heidegger there is no *personal* dimension to the bond between Dasein and Being, showing the analogy with Rosenzweig's idea of the bond between human being and God to be only partial. Nor can I say that Heidegger's work builds in any profound way upon the narratives of divine-human relationship described in the Hebrew Bible: Heidegger had to reject the Bible as a contributing factor in the misshapen genesis of Western metaphysics. What, after all, could Heidegger make of the phrase – "the Spirit [*Geist*] of God hovered over the waters" – but an inaugural moment in the "forgetting" of Being?⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The covenants between God and 'humanity' – or more properly, 'biblical Israel', following my discussion in the Introduction to the dissertation – work to illustrate correlation to, or relationship with, 'humanity'. In the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, God becomes dependent on a structure of referral that, as such, ceaselessly refers to an Other (to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses), away from itself. I explore this idea in greater detail in Chapter Seven. For my discussions on covenantal structure and function so far, see Chapter Three 96-103.

⁴⁹ I deliberately use the word 'forge' not out of Teutonic sentiment but in the figurative sense of creating a relationship, new condition, or horizon of possibility.

⁵⁰ See Heidegger's handout for the *Davoser Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, reproduced as an appendix to *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1997, 191-198).

Reorienting Thinking from Light (*Licht*) to Clearing (*Lichtung*)

In 1964, Heidegger wrote that if he were then writing *Being and Time*, it would be called *Lichtung und Anwesenheit* (in Caputo 1986, xxiii). *Lichtung* connotes a clearing, but also echoes the German word for ‘light’. Thus, as Caputo notes, in Heidegger’s later gloss on the relationship between Being and time, Being becomes a “Presence (*Anwesenheit*)” that is granted to us in the light of a “clearing” (ibid.). It is this clearing that constitutes the hermeneutical space of temporality in which Being shows itself. But this showing is not easily accessible to human understanding. Caputo reads the re-titling of *Being and Time* as reflecting Heidegger’s rhetorical zeal (similar to Rosenzweig’s in his later writings) to confront readers with an experience of language as ‘other’, as not ours: “The relation of Dasein to Being is not the work of Dasein, but of Being” (Caputo 1986, 163). In his “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger even changes Dasein to Da-Sein, the “*there-being*” of Being.⁵¹ Being described this way is a “happening” (*Ereignis*) that comes to the world on its own terms, through an event of language, also its own. Language belongs not to us, but to Being as Presence. As a corollary, we may be said to belong to Being, but only by virtue of our capacity to undergo the experience of language as ‘other’. This suggests that the crucial step in our attempt to think Being is to go beyond the illusion that language is somehow ‘for us’, manipulatable at our pleasure into transcendent power/knowledge: “Thus understood, the matter to be thought for Heidegger is the opening in which history and metaphysics, time and Being, are granted [through our undergoing the experience of language as other]” (Caputo 1986, xxiii).

In Ephraim Speiser’s translation of the opening passages of Genesis (for the Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries series), a similar view of the otherness of language seems very much in evidence:

When God began to create the heaven and the earth – the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and the spirit of God sweeping over the water – God said “Let there be light”, and there was light (Gen, 1:3-3). (Speiser 1964, 3)

By placing ‘the beginning’ as a ‘when’, Speiser captures the sense of creation as an ‘event’ equivalent perhaps to Heidegger’s *Ereignis* – in which Being comes to presence

⁵¹ “As ek-sisting, man sustains Da-Sein in that he takes the *Da*, the clearing of Being, into ‘care.’ But Da-Sein itself occurs essentially as ‘thrown.’ It unfolds essentially in the throw of Being as the fateful sending” (Heidegger 2008b, 231). See Krell’s note on Da-Sein in *Basic Writings* (in Heidegger 2008a, 48), and Macquarrie and Robinson’s note in *Being and Time* (in Heidegger 2004a, 27n1) for further explication.

through a burst of light, brought about through the willful utterance of the divine words: “Let there be light”. Thus the creation of light – the creation of the ‘clearing’ in which human beings will live – is constituted by divine speech. Speiser’s rendering of the Hebrew brings out a nuanced thinking in the original. This is not *creatio ex nihilo*; creation occurs as an event of speech in what clearly seems to be a preexisting language, a language that shares a prior co-existence with the God who uses it to create the world. The text’s first true verb, which begins the creation and the Hebrew Bible’s recorded history of God’s life with human being(s), is not ‘create’ as in ‘In the beginning God created ...’, but the verb *Vayomer* (‘to speak’) as in ‘When God began the creation of the world, he *spoke* and the world came into existence’.

Heidegger claims that being never reveals (or ‘de-conceals’, *entbirgt*) itself completely – and this is an identifiable trope in biblical narratives that contain God. The epistemological demand for certainty and the omniscience of a type of ‘unbounded unconcealment’ belongs to the metaphysical misrepresentation of being as constant presence. The act of returning to the biblical text and questioning ‘God as One and centre’ thinking opens up an interpretive event, a ‘clearing’ (*Lichtung*) or a space of intelligibility wherein an understanding of the construct of ‘God as One and centre’ thinking is revealed by a paradoxical movement between God’s self-disclosure to the Other in text, and the simultaneous covering over and concealment of both God (who must not be looked upon, and cannot be fully revealed) and of other deities by editors, redactors, and those seeking a theologically-grounded interpretation of the One and Only. It is only through such movement that knowledge of beings first becomes possible – and we (as readers, interpreters) are called on to take part in these events, which appropriate us into the world as a place of significant relations wherein we belong. Meaningful⁵² configurations of the world do come about, but such events of ‘unconcealment’ (*aletheia*) always entail at the same time a withdrawal into concealment. Truth is always coupled with untruth, openness with seclusion, clarity

⁵² It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage with Heidegger’s understanding of meaning and the meaningfulness of the meaningful (a question of the *source*) other than to clarify that ‘the meaningfulness of the meaningful’ refers to the simple but astonishing fact that things are meaningful at all. Heidegger called this “the wonder of all wonders: *that beings are*” (Heidegger 1998a, 234). This lead-in issue is the traditional one about *on hēi on* (beings as such) or *ens qua ens* (being as being), but now understood in a phenomenological mode: ‘What is the most basic structure of the things we encounter?’ to which Heidegger answers: ‘Things as such are meaningful: they make sense’. The *meaning-giving source* of ‘the meaning of the meaningful’ refers to the *a priori* process whereby anything meaningful has its meaning. The early Heidegger analysed this source-of-meaning as the bond of ‘being-in’ and ‘world’. This is the human-meaning bond that he originally called being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) and later on called *Lichtung-sein*. This human-meaning phenomenon will eventually be named *Ereignis*, the appropriating of human to the task of sustaining meaning-giving (see Heidegger 2012, 51-53). Additionally, see Benjamin Crowe *Heidegger’s Religious Origins: Destruction and Authenticity* (2006, 231-65).

with mystery. Being withdraws as it comes to presence; it expropriates as it appropriates; it holds back as it gives. This understanding of truth as a twofold event of the revealing/concealing of being is a central thread running through Heidegger's path of thought (Heidegger 2010a, 204-220; 2004a, 256-273; 1998a, 136-154), and a central thread running through configurations of God as One and Only thinking.

Heidegger had already spoken of 'clearing' (*Lichtung*) in earlier works. In *Being and Time* the term is used to explain "disclosedness" as well as the kinship of this ontological characteristic of *Dasein* with the image of the *lumen naturale* (Heidegger 2004a, 171). Heidegger also employs the expression in "The Origin of the Work of Art" in which he no longer delineates 'clearing' in terms of light, but rather as "an open place" (Heidegger 2008e, 178). Beings "stand within and stand out within" this openness, which provides us with a "passage to those beings" (ibid.). The clearing is the possibility of phenomena. It must be admitted that in "The Origin of the Work of Art", first published in 1950, Heidegger still gives the term 'clearing' a distinctly different accent than it has in his later texts. In the art essay, the clearing is thought as the openness of concealing and unconcealing, and is bound to the "strife" of "world" and "earth" – a relationship that will become increasingly important in the following chapters if we are to further open up the aporia marking 'God as centre' thinking (2008e, 143). The concept of the clearing is thus synonymous with the happening of clearing, in a sense quite consistent with Heidegger's earlier conception: a happening that is now at the same time above all the happening of withdrawal, denial and refusal. The clearing, says Heidegger, "is never a rigid stage with a permanently raised curtain", but instead happens as "concealment" (Heidegger 2008e, 179). Something shows itself inasmuch as it has been drawn out of concealment and indicated.⁵³

The Heideggerian Filter: Explicating Divine Self-disclosure in Terms of Unconcealment

Finally, it is worth recalling that 'unconcealment' (*Unverborgenheit*) first entered Heidegger's philosophy as a translation for the ancient Greek word *alêtheia*. The more

⁵³ The clearing is considered rather differently in the late text *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*. Here the clearing is called the "place of stillness" that "first grants unconcealment", that is, allows the play of concealing and unconcealing (Heidegger 2008d, 445). The clearing is the "free space" (444) or distancing occupied neither by the present nor by the absent. It is neither beings nor not-beings; it is the interval in which something can show itself and be shown.

standard translation of *alêtheia* is ‘truth’ (*Wahrheit*), but Heidegger elected to go with a literal translation: *a-lêtheia* means literally ‘not-concealed’. He did this because he contended the early Greeks thought of ‘truth’ as primarily a matter of “making available as unconcealed, as there out in the open, what was previously concealed or covered up” (Heidegger 1999b, 11). Heidegger eventually came to believe that the Greeks themselves had failed to grasp what was essential to the notion of unconcealment, what he had initially thought was hinted at in their word *alêtheia*. He thus set to the task of thinking the original notion more ‘originally’⁵⁴ than anyone had before, and indeed Heidegger’s thought can usefully be seen as working out the implications of the ‘original’ understanding of unconcealment. To think unconcealment as such is to reject the idea that there are entities, we know not what, existing as they are independently of the conditions (political, theological, linguistic, etc.) under which they can manifest themselves. Unconcealment is an event. It happens, and it only happens “with human beings” through “the creative projection of essence and the law of essence” (Heidegger 2010b, 135). Unconcealment also rejects the idea that there are uniquely right answers to questions such as what entities are and what being is. Instead, it holds that we encounter entities as being what they are only in virtue of the world within which they can be disclosed and encountered. But these worlds are themselves subject to unconcealment – they emerge historically and are susceptible to dissolution and *destruktion*. Thus being itself must be understood not as something determinate and stable, but in terms of the conditions for the emergence of entities and worlds out of concealment into unconcealment.

Unconcealment so understood is a privative notion – it consists in removing concealment. Consequently, concealment is in some sense to be given priority in understanding entities and worlds. But “[t]he concealed has”, Heidegger observes, “a double sense: 1) something with which we are unfamiliar; 2) something to which we have no possible connection” (Heidegger 2010b, 144). The first sense describes a superficial form of concealment, where something is, but we lack a sense for it. The second sense points to the more profound and fundamental form of concealment. According to Heidegger, for an entity to be, is for it to stand in a context of constitutive relations.⁵⁵ The lack of any possible context is thus an ontological concealment – the

⁵⁴ When I say that, for me, Heidegger thinks the original notion more originally, I am not here referring to authenticity or even an appeal to metaphysical lines of truth or origin, but rather that Heidegger takes a word, a concept and makes it more complex (and thus, more problematic) than the original (or everyday use) of that word. The word ‘unconcealment’ is a good case in point.

⁵⁵ I directly address the point of constitutive relations in my discussion of a renewed ethical trajectory for thinking God and monotheism in Chapter Eight.

absence of the conditions under which the entity in question could manifest itself in being. Thus, there is a duality or productive ambiguity built into the core notion of unconcealment: unconcealment consists in bringing things to awareness, but also creating the context within which things can be what they are.

This, I suggest, is an important way back into revisiting biblical texts through a different lens. First, however, it is worth unpacking the productive ambiguity offered by Heidegger's notion of unconcealment further, in this instance via narratives in the Hebrew Bible specifically focused on God's self-disclosure. Earlier, in Chapter Two, I recounted how God's self-disclosure to Abram/Abraham in Genesis re-emerges and is re-configured with Moses in Exodus. Thus, although, when "The LORD appeared to Abram" (Gen 12:7) is the first theophany (or divine revelation) introduced by the Hebrew *vayera*, this is distinct from divine speech to an individual introduced by *vayomer*.

The core notion of unconcealment functions as a methodological principle throughout Heidegger's work. By methodological principle I mean here that unconcealment was in Heidegger's approach to philosophy the guideline for discerning the role and constitutive structure of the elements of ontology. One can see this by considering how it is that Heidegger defined the ontological features of his thought – for instance, the *existentialia* of *Being and Time* (Heidegger's ontological categories for the human mode of being),⁵⁶ *Ereignis*, earth and world, language and the fourfold. All of these notions were understood in terms of the role they played in opening up a world, disclosing us and uncovering entities on the basis of the possibilities opened up by a particular world projection. Heidegger's ontology was grounded in this way in the notion of unconcealment. The question in individuating and understanding ontological structures was always: what does *this* contribute to opening up a world and letting entities show up as the things they are? Put differently, what disclosive function does it perform?

The idea here is that history should be thought of in terms of unconcealment and thus as a sequence of different world disclosures, and, as noted, the history that interests Heidegger is a history of different ways in which entities are able to show themselves. "The essence of history", Heidegger explains, shows itself in the "separation of the truth of entities from possibilities of essence that are kept in store and permitted but in each

⁵⁶ Heidegger's *Being and Time* presents a complex system outlining the basic ways of Dasein's Being, the *existentialia*. Prominent among these fundamental *existentialia* are the basic modes of disclosedness, namely 'understanding' (*Verstehen*), 'disposition' (*Befindlichkeit*), 'falling' (*Verfallen*), and 'disclosure' (*Rede*).

case not now implemented” (Heidegger 1998b, 162). From the perspective of unconcealment, then, historical ages are understood as the establishment of the ‘truth of entities’ – a truth about what entities really are – which is secured in its truth by separating off one set of possibilities from other admissible sets of possibilities, sets of ways to understand and use and relate entities. On this view, because each age is grounded in a different unconcealment of being, with correspondingly different possibilities showing up as definitive of entities, different entities show themselves in different historical ages. The transition from one age to another thus poses a danger that entities will be denied the context within which they can show what they once were (or could be). This happened, for instance, when God was drawn into a world that understands constitutive relations in terms of efficient causality. In whatever manner the destiny of disclosing may prevail, unconcealment, in which everything that is shows itself at any given time, holds the danger that human beings mistake themselves in the midst of what is unconcealed and misinterpret it (and themselves). In this way, where everything presencing presents itself in the light of connections of cause and effect, in our representations of him even God can lose all that is high and holy, the mysteriousness of his distance. In the light of causality, God can be degraded to a cause, to the *causa efficiens*. He then even becomes the God of the philosophers, namely that which is able to determine the unconcealed and concealed, according to the causality of making, without ever considering the origin of the essence of this causality (Heidegger 2008f, 331).

From what I have said so far, one might see Heidegger as advocating the historical picture of philosophy in opposition to the ahistorical. There is some truth to this, provided that ‘history’ is ‘properly’ understood. Nevertheless, it would be a very crude misreading of Heidegger to attribute to him the view that philosophy is simply a cultural-historical phenomenon. To the contrary, he holds that cultural changes and crises are governed by a background understanding of being, and it is to this ontological background that philosophy is first responsible. To the extent that philosophers are responsive to the call to think being, they and their work are removed from ordinary historical and cultural influences. Heidegger thus argues that it is a mistake to treat the thought of a thinker as circumscribed by “the influences of the milieu and the effects of their actual ‘life’ situation” (Heidegger 1991b, 22). At work here is a distinction between two different ways of thinking about history: history (*Geschichte*) versus historiology or historiography (*Historie*). A brief reminder of the distinction will be useful. Historiology is concerned with thoughts, words, experiences, deeds, and rules –

in short, all the stuff of ordinary history. But historical events are, according to Heidegger, determined by a background understanding that shapes and constitutes foreground activities. Heidegger refers to this background as that “open region of goals, standards, drives and powers” (Heidegger 1994, 34) – the region of everything in terms of which any particular action or experience is what it is. The series of different background understandings is what constitutes history in the deeper sense. That there are fundamentally different ways in which to be an entity testifies, for Heidegger, to the fact that there is no necessary way that the background must function.

In this sense, the background is itself dependent on ‘the nothing’ that I discussed earlier.⁵⁷ ‘The nothing’ is misunderstood if it is construed as a negative existential quantification (although it entails the following proposition that does employ a negative existential quantification: there is no thing that determines the character of the background understanding of being). To call the background ‘nothing’ is to point out that it is not a thing, and does not operate in the same way that things in the foreground do. Metaphysics, as I have indicated throughout, is one attempt to think and name the being of what is. But because metaphysicians, Heidegger argues, do not understand that there is a background, which is not itself an entity, that constitutes the foreground as what it is, they interpret the unity of the foreground in terms of some uniform thing or feature in virtue of which everything is what it is. That is, metaphysics “thinks what is as a whole – the world, men, God – with respect to being, with respect to the unity of what is in being” (Heidegger 2008d, 432). Thus, as we have seen, the history of the West and of metaphysics on Heidegger’s interpretation consists in a series of ways in which the being of what is – that characteristic or feature in virtue of which anything is what it is – has been given or ‘unconcealed’ to human beings. With each ‘unconcealment of being’, human beings have become progressively more oblivious to the fact that their everyday thoughts, activities, identities, and so on are grounded in a background understanding of being that is neither necessary in its structure nor within human control. While Heidegger believed that the metaphysical tradition has failed to think the background or ‘clearing’ within which everything is what it is, he also believed that philosophers have nevertheless played a privileged role in opening up the possibilities given by the prevailing understanding of being. The history of being – a history traceable in the work of the metaphysicians – falls, according to Heidegger, into four distinct periods: the Greek (in which what is was primarily understood as *phusis* or

⁵⁷ See Chapter Three for my discussion of ‘nothings’ in relation to *’ēlîlîm* (102-103, 102n20), and Chapter Four in relation to the ‘God of nothing’ of the negative theological traditions.

self-arising nature), the Medieval (in which what is was understood as “God’s creation”), the Modern (where “beings became objects that could be controlled and penetrated by calculation”) (Heidegger 2008e, 201), and finally an intensification of the Modern, the Technological (in which what is, is understood as standing reserve – that is, as being constantly available for flexible reconfiguration, and thus maximally exploitable). Metaphysics, on this view, affects much more than philosophy. Indeed, as discussed at the beginning of this dissertation, this point about metaphysics affecting much more than philosophy, indeed much more than theology, will be of increasing importance from this point on. The metaphysical thinkers actually help open and trace a space of possibilities for a culture by articulating, and thus making available to our practices in general, the understanding of being that characterizes (or is coming to characterize) the age. The best way to explain what Heidegger means is to review one of his examples of the way in which a philosopher, by responding to a new understanding of being, articulated it and, in the process, made it possible to experience the world in a new way.

As Heidegger understands it, ever since the earliest Greek thinkers, human action in the world has been shaped and guided by a unified background understanding of what it means to be. Whilst Heidegger’s discussion of the background was in relation to his engagement with technology, the concept of the background is a useful one for thinking through the prevalence of Judeo-Christian formulations of God (as One and Only), and how it is humans came to be (in a prescriptive sense). The actions of western individuals, groups and nations that stand upon a foundation of One and Only thinking are now completely occluded due to the fact that foreground activities are grounded by a background understanding of being that has been largely constituted by a monotheistic schemata. And this makes it almost impossible to own up to the way we are, in all our activities, essentially responsible to a background, an issue that will be further pursued in subsequent chapters.⁵⁸ Framed this way, Heidegger believes that metaphysics can only genuinely be overcome if we can somehow recover a sensibility for the background, and if we can learn to see how it constitutes the present and opens up futural possibilities. And this, Heidegger insists, requires an historical, destructive inquiry for two main reasons. First, because the background is so completely entrenched as to escape our notice, it is only an historical thought that can loosen the grasp that our metaphysical understanding of being has on us. If we immerse ourselves in an historical

⁵⁸ For a perspicuous discussion of Heidegger’s understanding of the danger of our oblivion to metaphysics, see Hubert L. Dreyfus, “Heidegger on the Connection Between Nihilism, Art, Technology, and Politics” (1993, 289-316).

reflection on the understanding of a past age, our current presuppositions and practices may come to seem strange and ungrounded. And, if that happens, we should be prepared to confront the fact that we ourselves are thoroughly shaped by an understanding of the being of beings – an understanding that, while once revolutionary, is now so commonplace as to go unnoticed. As Heidegger notes, “in order to rescue the beginning, and consequently the future [i.e., the background understanding of being that shapes our current practices and future possibilities], from time to time the domination of the ordinary and all too ordinary must be broken” (Heidegger 1994, 38). History, by giving us a “genuine relation to the beginning,” brings about just such an “upheaval of what is habitual” (ibid.). Similarly, historical thought calls to our attention what Hubert Dreyfus has called “marginal practices” – that is, ways of acting that draw their intelligibility from a different background understanding of being than now prevails (Dreyfus 1993, 302). By learning to take these practices seriously, something we can only do when we see them against the background of the understanding of being that first grounded them, we can foster a readiness that will allow us to respond differently to the people and things we encounter in our everyday world. As Heidegger puts it, historical thought is ‘preparatory’ in the sense that it prepares us for an escape from the metaphysics of our current age (Heidegger 1999a, 60).

Conclusion

To conclude, I have traced in this chapter a second pathway initiated by Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’ thinking, in this case engaging the work and ambitions of Heidegger. I have laid out Heidegger’s *destruktive* retrieval of metaphysics and the intertwining of theology and philosophy through an examination of Buber and Rosenzweig’s biblical translation – itself a reaction against Luther’s translation – as a form of ontological retrieval. In explicitly discussing Heidegger’s retelling of translation and interpretation, I have argued that western thinking has always attempted to name being as presence, and that such a move acts as the very origin and ground of the world. In order to further my position that metaphysics establishes the conceptual parameters of intelligibility by ontologically grounding and theologically legitimating our changing sense of an historical sense of what is, I drew on Heidegger’s concept of *Lichtung* (clearing) and briefly explicated this through examples of divine self-disclosure in the Bible. One question that arises is: What does this change about the text? I think this changes

nothing about the biblical text *per se*, but I do think it could fundamentally change the way readers approach and interpret the text, particularly with reference to ‘One and Only’ thinking.⁵⁹ This, I have shown, has only a tenuous presence within the biblical texts themselves, despite its enormous presence within the history of the western world. An additional problem, however, becomes apparent for monotheism in taking into account Heidegger’s notion of unconcealment and clearing: unconcealment is a hiding of something else. Un-hiddenness (*a-letheia*) palimpsestuously supposes a hiddenness. What is more, and what further complicates this issue, is that that hiddenness is not traceable simply to either the obstruction of some entities by others, or the shortsightedness of some observers. In seeking, then, to further trace these strands of an aporetic genealogy of ‘One and Only’ thinking and the metaphysics of presence in biblical texts, the following chapter explores Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction as another eventalisation of presencing.

⁵⁹ The importance of re-reading familiar texts with new perspective is crucial if we are to move beyond the impasse of God as One and Only thinking. Re-reading and interpretation work to further undermine claims to closed texts, and allow the taking up of a thinking stance toward the margins, towards what has been overwritten and could lead to a chance in the ways readers of biblical texts respond to Others.

Chapter Seven

The Deconstruction of Presence and Divine Supplementarity

Like the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, Derrida's *différance* is untranslatable, undefinable, unthinkable. *Différance* cannot be thought by any ontology, nor can it be elevated to a master-word, master-concept, or master-key (Cf. "Passe-partout," *VP* 17). Rather, *différance* is inscribed, enmeshed in a "chain of other 'concepts,' other 'words,' other textual configuration" and substitutions (*P* 40). It is a chain that has no taxinomical, lexical, or ontological closure. To be certain, *différance* disrupts the mastery and confidence of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, the sovereignty of a certain philosophical heritage oriented by the desire and mastery of consciousness to comprehend itself. (Ormiston 1988, 41)

Introduction

With the previous chapters mapping some of the primary instantiations of both the positive (Chapters One to Three) and negative (Chapters Four to Six) discursive frameworks and events comprising my genealogy of presencing and (as) God as the One and Only of monotheism, this chapter turns to tracing *différance* as the deconstructive play informing both presencing and its positive-negative distinction, taking this as marking another of the genealogical trajectories for the presencing work both shaping and destabilising monotheism. This is to trace Jacques Derrida's deconstruction as another major eventalisation of presencing, but one that implicates and complicates all of the positive and negative modes of thinking/presencing examined previously. This is also to work through what has been called the first stage of a deconstruction; to foreground the way the play of *différance*, pluralities and supplementarity disrupt the desired work of presencing – in both its positive and negative modes – to stabilise meaning and identities. Such a focus, introducing Derrida's conceptions and practices of deconstruction, will also thus delineate some of Derrida's own complex engagements with both the positive and negative modes of

presencing (and) the monotheistic God. Carrying out what can be called the second stage of deconstruction – to show how both the positive and negative modes of presencing conventionally thought to found and inform thinking and monotheism are both made possible and ruined by the prior logics of deconstruction and supplementarity – will be the focus of the following and last chapter of this dissertation.

The purpose of this chapter is, then, to show how Derrida's deconstructive logics of arche-writing, *différance*, the trace, play, and the supplement¹ solicit – and reformulate – the events and capacities of (divine) presence as mapped both kataphatically and apophatically in previous chapters (historically, theologically and philosophically). Given that such a focus draws into question the very capacities of presence and presencing (whether positively or negatively inflected) to found and legitimate meaning and identity – capacities deemed fundamental to the monotheistic theological – mono-theo-logical – and the onto-theologic philosophical traditions – this chapter thus begins with a reiteration of the role of covenant in the presencing of God (and as) monotheism, a focus bringing back into the foreground a range of the issues considered in Chapters One, Two, Three and Four. This will be followed by an unfolding of Derrida's deconstructive logics of arche-writing, *différance*, the trace, play, and supplementarity, showing how such logics disrupt the convenantal logics or presences examined in the previous section (and chapters). Three such disruptions of covenantal logic and presence are finally mapped with reference to a) the formulations of names and naming set out in Exodus and Deuteronomy, b) the practices of absence and appeal set out in Exodus 31-34, and c) the manifestations of the hidden that can be discerned in the God-Moses relation. Re-engaging motifs introduced in earlier chapters,

¹ Although I will further unpack in greater detail my engagement of supplementarity and the trace in this chapter, it is worth pre-empting that discussion here with a brief explication of these Derridean terms. There is a relation between supplement and origin. We will see how the origin can never be completely present for Derrida, so what we have is always a supplement, as an addition or replacement. For example, and taking a cue from Derrida's essay "Edmond Jabés and the Question of the Book" where writing is both already the writing of the origin, and the concealment of the origin (Derrida 1978a, 64-78, see esp. 67), there can be no truthfulness in the origin. Writing is the separation of the origin, the following of traces of the origin. Writing designates the closure of the book and the opening of the text. The closure of the book is the theological encyclopaedia modelled on the book of man. The closure of the book allows the affirmative wandering of the written mark to become a wandering without return, and adventure of expenditure without a reserve of anything. The opening of the text is the network of traces marking the disappearance of exceeded God or erased man. It is only in the book that we can designate the writing behind the book. Repetition itself does not let itself be contained within the book. The passion of the origin of writing is not the origin, but the trace that takes its place. The trace is what replaces a presence that has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun. The book claims that the return of the 'origin' that inspired it should be its complete presence. The mythical book preceding all repetition lives on the deception that the centre is irreplaceable, outside all play and figurative in language. Once the book lends itself to representation, which is when it is written, the book is read as a book, as an abyss of the infinite redoubling of origin and centre. The space of the centre calls to us as death and God, but it can only be a void, and a labyrinth. Without presence, writing is a beyond of the book.

these also preface my extended discussions of the disruptive logics of Derridean deconstruction and their impacts on the monotheistic modes of thinking and presencing God and identity in Chapter Eight.

Covenant: Presencing and (as) Obligation

Monotheism, then, is not simply a myth of one-ness, but a doctrine of possession, of a people by God, of a land by a people, of women by men. (Schwartz 1997, 71)

Monotheism is framed through covenant. As has been elaborated in the first part of this dissertation, covenant is an obligatory relationship entered upon between God and, in the case of the Hebrew Bible, ancient Israel as his Chosen people. So far I have delineated, albeit briefly, a range of the covenantal relationships found in biblical narratives, including the Adamic, the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, and the Davidic covenants, in order to demonstrate two points. The first concerned their centrality to the creation and maintenance of the identity and presence of both ancient Israel and God (El/Elohim/Yahweh, depending on the textual location of the covenant). Themselves comprising a series of genealogical events, these covenants see humanity created and the Hebrews become Israelites. The Israelites are elected in exchange for fidelity to God and fidelity to the laws of God. In return for fidelity, God bestows upon Israel the additional gifts of God's name and presence, his protection from outright destruction, the promise of descendants and land, the mark of circumcision as a sign of covenant, the promise of distinction within adherence to the law, the gift of the laws themselves and responsibility for upholding these laws as the Chosen people, and, finally, the promise of kingship and a messianic future-to-come through the Davidic line. Any point on the centrality of covenant for the creation and maintenance of the Israelites' identity also entails the other major component in the covenantal relationship: the monotheistic God of the Hebrew Bible.

Throughout the covenants delineated in the Hebrew Bible, the creation and maintenance of this God's identity are at the forefront of narratives. As each covenant is approached, unfolded and ratified, the identity of the One and Only God gradually

coalesces.² The creator god El of the primeval materials is powerful but does not appear fully formed in terms of identity: this God has breath, this God moves across the waters of the deep and creates, but God's textual presence is located in the creative force of his will, his disembodied voice, and some few references to his walking in the presence of humans (see, for example, Gen 1-3:22; Ex 23:12-23). The language (and sometimes presence) of God in the Garden of Eden in which Adam and Eve are confined, is also of a God not fully formed and without a proper name as demonstrated in the slippage that occurs in the Hebrew use of Elohim/Yahweh-Elohim (see, for example, Gen 1-3). Noah's God is bent on annihilating wickedness and re-writing the surface of the earth by erasing life with the Deluge (see Gen 6:5-8:19). This is a God who has made a mistake and who, after warning Noah and only preserving the most basic animal and plant genetic materials, will palimpsestuously over-write this world with a 'better' one in which a new covenant – never again to destroy as he has just destroyed – can be made with righteous humans (that is, the righteousness of humans will ensure that God will never be again placed in the position where he should need to act in such a way). In the Abrahamic covenant – the covenant of circumcision and the promises of descendants and land (see Gen 15:18-21; 17:2-19; see the sign of the Abrahamic covenant – *brit milah* – at 17:9-14) – the identity of God in these narratives is more personal. That is to say, this God takes an active interest in Abraham and his descendants. The Mosaic covenant reconstitutes God's identity from the God of the Fathers to a God with a name. Yahweh identifies himself to Moses in a complex series of theophanies in which Moses demands a proper name from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God gives Moses a name for the people as well as a justification for a change in that name. The God formerly known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and El is now Yahweh. Finally, the God of the Davidic covenant promises a temple, kingship and a messiah to come for the people (see 2 Sam 7; Jer 33:17-21), but – as in the Priestly covenant between Aaron and the priests, which I have not discussed³ – there is arguably little presencing of the identity of Yahweh and more of the theo-political groups wanting to install a king or legitimating the priestly caste.

Given this manifold of covenants, it is important that when any specific gift or particular obligation instituted by a covenantal relationship is mentioned, what must be

² This is not to be reductive and suggest that there is any progressive or linear sense to the representation of God's identity, given the disparity of the literary sources traceable in the biblical texts. For discussion of this disparity, see Chapters Two and Three.

³ As a reader, the Davidic and Priestly covenants pale in comparison to the theophanies in Exodus and Deuteronomy. The Priestly covenant is one term used for the covenant made between God and Aaron and his descendants – the Aaronic priesthood (Ex 29:44-46).

clear is *which* covenantal relationship in particular is being examined. That is to say, the gift of monarchy given in the Davidic covenant could not be located anywhere sensibly other than in the narratives of David and Solomon, just as the Adamic covenant – with the creation of humankind and God’s bestowal of the gift of naming the animals to Adam (a powerful, creative and god-like gift reserved ordinarily for gods and goddesses in ancient Near Eastern literature) – could only be located within that genealogical event. This leads directly to my second reason for discussing covenant in this dissertation, which is that these covenants themselves are instantiations of presencing and re-presencing, where what is presenced – made present, made into self-present identity – in any one covenant supplants or supersedes what is presenced (and thus identifiable) in preceding ones.⁴ Here the connection of presence and identity is made very clear. The covenant that Adam and Eve break is irreparable and they are cast out, they *are* no longer with and of God; the covenant with Noah occurs after God eliminates all but one extended God-fearing family; the covenant with Abraham is inscribed – unmistakably, irreparably – on the body as a reminder to remain faithful; the covenant with Moses with its institution of written and oral laws supplants the Abrahamic priority of circumcision and the prior-threat of a Noahide-like cleansing. These formal, written laws are also supplanted when Moses smashes the first commandments and they are written anew.⁵ The Mosaic covenant ups the ante by having God’s presence travel with the people, by Yahweh’s supplanting of the older El and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Priestly covenant seeks to supplant the wicked behaviour of a wayward people with the righteous behaviour of the Chosen people as envisioned by God (and his priests), and the Davidic covenant gestures towards the supplanting of God by a messiah-to-come, and sees the building of a temple (the house of God) which will supplant the cultural memory of God’s presence in the desert with ancient Israel.

To elaborate this further, presencing – in this instance, the presencing of the various events of monotheism – is always a call for identity, boundaries, chosenness and

⁴ I have explored Heidegger’s discussion that acknowledges that Being is presencing, and Derrida’s radical twist to the problem of presence by denying its privileged position in western philosophy in earlier chapters. We can create a difference between ourselves and others when we assume a proper name that appears to give us presence. But this self-presence is only possible in the quickly passing moment since the self is radically temporal, it possesses a synthetic and not enduring identity because difference is always associated with the identity of the self, representing a union of identity and difference and presence and absence. The interplay of identity and difference and presence and absence causes a disruption in the presence of the self and dislocation in the present modality of time, which suggests the present is merely a trace and that time is forever a transition of moments.

⁵ I reconsider the Mosaic covenant in a different light in the following chapter by proposing a thinking stance that moves away from the One and Only to what I am calling a return to exile.

obligation. First, there is the conventional point that monotheism – those genealogies, practices and logics of the One and Only that have been at the forefront of my dissertation – calls for identity formations that fundamentally involve the contraction of an ‘us’ against a ‘them’.⁶ Although difficult to define with precision – an engagement beyond the scope of this dissertation – identity connotes individuality and separation (as in the Chosen people), uniqueness (as in one of the twelve tribes of Israel), and nomination (which can be granted in the case of characters such as Abraham, Moses and David, but also in the case of Moses seeking to possess an identification for God). This focus on identity and the knowing of names only extends, however, to the ‘us’ part of narratives. It always disregards the not-named. We ‘know’ very little of those identified only, for example, as Abraham’s servant, Pharaoh’s daughter, or Jeroboam’s wife. Their distinctiveness emerges from their particular circumstances and the ways in which they respond to these circumstances. At the same time, their identities blend with the others of their kind, with the other servants, daughters, and wives to whom they are bound by these labels. In these examples, the not-named are effaced and their identities are curtailed. This suits the monotheistic imperative for distinctiveness. It is by being named that distinction is given: Yahweh is our God. Yahweh is not only named (a proper name) but also claimed as God. The imperative for distinctiveness in identity also operates in a divisive manner – ancient Israel is nothing like the Moabites – meaning distinctiveness can be used to justify excluding or even displacing those that are not like ‘us’. The creation of identity and the giving of covenant hence entail the setting of boundaries. Laws are thus given that govern the way biblical Israel must act if it is to keep covenant with Yahweh and remain his Chosen people. These laws include ways of acting, speaking and worshipping which are identifiably Israelite and an acceptance that to deviate from these is to cross the boundary and become a not-us, a move that in many biblical narratives will result in death. As such, monotheism, understood as covenant, calls for presence, identity and (as) obligation in very specific ways: through written and oral law, through the preservation of cultural distinctiveness (ritual and observance of purity) and through fidelity to covenant with the One and Only God. These directives on how humanity (in the primeval materials) and the Israelites are

⁶ As Chantal Mouffe reminds us of the operation of constructs such as ‘us’ and ‘them’: “What is at a given moment accepted as the ‘natural’ order, jointly with the common sense that accompanies it, is the result of sedimented hegemony practices. It is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity that is exterior to the practices that brought it into being” (Mouffe 2013, 216). This type of hegemony is felt rather than thought, and requires a constitutive outside. A people is being called into being in the construct of shared feelings of commitment and belonging in the context of covenant, but this is always incomplete and unstable at the margins. I utilise and reconfigure this incompleteness and instability at the margins in Chapter Eight.

to live come from God and are positioned not as a human-centric call to behaviour but as divinely presenced and thus mandated.

Arche-writing, *Différance*, and the Disruption of Presence/ing

For Heidegger, of course, recognition of such covenantal presence (and obligation) is the problem. As he has thus argued, and as discussed in the preceding chapter, the problematic driving the last two thousand years of onto-theological thought has been the replacement of being by beings, the repeated covering up of being (*Sein*).⁷ In other words, rather than understanding being as it actually is (the being of all particular beings), onto-theology has shown a tendency to erroneously conceive of being as if it were just another thing,⁸ or on the basis of some covenant. The Heideggerian task, therefore, as previously discussed, has been to identify the distracting accretions of traditions, canons and covenants, and to refocus thinking on that largely forgotten grasp of being itself – a sort of thinking that was more commonly achieved, Heidegger argued, among the pre-Socratic thinkers.⁹

For Derrida, the problem is slightly different: the mistake has been to think truth, being and identity through the register of a positively inflected (that is, covenantal) presence.¹⁰ As I have already noted, nearly all conceptions of ‘truth’ and ‘identity’ in

⁷ See my discussion of being that lies concealed within a history that *already* claims us in Chapter Six, from 209.

⁸ For a discussion of this erroneous thing-ness of being see Mummery (2005, 19-21).

⁹ Heidegger’s innovation in his reading of the pre-Socratics stems from his awareness of the philological and philosophical debates surrounding how to interpret pre-Socratic thinkers as well as his willingness to carry interpretation beyond the limits of this debate. Not concerned with producing a ‘correct representation’ of prior philosophers, Heidegger was, rather, philosophically engaged in the matter at hand. In this sense, then, Heidegger aligns himself with Hegel’s view of the history of philosophy – presented in *The Science of Logic* (2010b) – as it relates to his metaphysical system, and Nietzsche’s view of the role of history with regard to the will to power and the eternal return. Although the relationship between Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger is extremely complicated, for my purposes here what is significant for all three is a need to have their thinking involved in the matter of the history of philosophy itself. That is, they attempt to take part in the movement of history itself by philosophising. Although the three thinkers differ on what the matter of this history is, there are striking similarities in their approach: all three do not wish to rephrase the current debates surrounding the interpretation of philosophers; all three are not concerned with conventional representations of previous philosophers; all three attempt to expose the ‘ground’ of the history of philosophising itself and, thereby, what is necessary in this ground. A good general overview can be found in *Heidegger and the Greeks* (Hyland and Manoussakis, eds. 2006). See also, Heidegger’s *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1987), *Parmenides* (1998c), and *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1995).

¹⁰ According to Derrida, even Heidegger ultimately essentialises Being, designating it the ‘transcendental signified’ to which all signifiers eventually refer. Heideggerian Being remains outside the play of language, transcendent of the signification it engenders. At the same time, Derrida reformulates Heidegger’s point, stressing that as ‘theological’ theology is, especially for early Derrida, it remains coextensive with the totalising metaphysical order. To put this otherwise, there is no theology other than

the history of philosophy and theology have centred on the knower in some sense being *present* to the object of knowledge. Against this tradition, taking his inspiration from Heidegger's call in *Being and Time* for a *destruktion* of the western metaphysical tradition, Derrida regards the privileging of presence – whether in positive or negative terms – to be one of the most profound shortcomings of western philosophy. For Derrida, although he cannot be described as a negative onto-theologian as such (see, e.g., Hart 2000, 95; Caputo 1997b, 20), what is *not* present is more important in our intellectual life.¹¹ Moreover, he says, pure presence of the sort normally imagined in theology or philosophy – whether positively or negatively – is never achievable. On this model, what is taken to be true is assumed to be based upon that which is or can be immediately, fully and transparently present to us. This has taken the form of, for example, a direct observation, sensation or impression (empiricism), a clear and distinct idea (Descartes), an intelligible form, or essence (Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas), or the human voice or God. Derrida conversely maintains – drawing on insights gleaned from Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger – that closer scrutiny shows that nothing is or can be immediately present to us in this way. To claim a basis in the presence of the true and the real, therefore, is to claim the unachievable; even, Derrida contends, in the form of Heidegger's attempt to retrieve an authentic and resolute comprehension of being. In making this point, Derrida (1997a) famously criticised past philosophical enterprises for privileging speaking over writing, for holding that the spoken voice places us in direct presence of the other and the meaning of his or her words. In Derrida's analysis, speaking can make meaning no more present than writing. That meaning is possible, despite its failure to achieve pure presence, shorn of absence, he variously attributes to the workings of arche-writing, *différance*, the trace, play, and supplementarity. Each of

onto-theology. Theology is the logocentric 'sublimation of the trace' – an imperialistic discourse that clings to an impossible 'presence' by denying the absence that constitutes it. Throughout the history of both theology and western metaphysics, signification has been regulated through a theological obsession with univocity, through "the encyclopaedic protection of theology and logocentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and, as I shall specify later, against difference in general" (Derrida 1997a, 18). Theology is the height of totalising pretence, and to that extent, the return of the repressed *gramme* will be profoundly anti-theological. Because he equates the theological and the onto-theological in this manner, Derrida can claim that deconstruction "blocks every relationship to theology" (Derrida 1981b, 40). Theology as denial-of-difference cannot withstand the violent return of difference-itself.

¹¹ Heidegger's understanding of ontological difference as the blind-spot of metaphysics becomes the basis for Derrida's reading of metaphysics as "the system functioning as the effacing of difference" (Derrida 1997a, 23). Translated into Derridean terms, Heidegger's 'step back' toward difference-as-difference becomes a re-cognition of the radical anteriority of *différance*: the spatio-temporal difference/deferral that identity both requires and represses. And although Derrida, unlike Heidegger, does not think it possible to *overcome* metaphysics, he does think it possible to *disrupt* metaphysics by provoking a return to the difference it represents from within the repressive structure itself. 'Deconstruction' could be read as this provocation.

these, as will be shown below, challenge the ideas and distinctions of presencing and identity taken as ideal in previous chapters.

One of the prominent distinctions which Derrida's earlier work is concerned to interrogate is that between speech and writing.¹² According to Derrida, thinkers as different as Plato, Rousseau, Saussure and Levi-Strauss have all denigrated the written word, valorising speech, by contrast, as some type of pure conduit of meaning. Their common argument is that while spoken words are the symbols of mental experience, written words are the symbols of that already existing symbol. As representations of speech, they are doubly derivative and doubly far from a unity with one's own thought.¹³ Without going into detail regarding the ways in which these thinkers have set about justifying this type of hierarchical opposition, it is important to remember that Derrida's first strategy of deconstruction is to reverse existing oppositions. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida (1997a) hence attempts to illustrate that the structures of writing and grammatology are more important and even 'older' than the supposedly pure structure of presence-to-self that is characterised (by Plato et al) as typical of speech and which grounds the conceptions of covenant with which I began this chapter.

In *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere, Derrida argues that signification, broadly conceived, always refers to other signs, and that one can never reach a sign that refers

¹² In *Dissemination*, Derrida discusses this holding as the relationship between speech and writing, and as a consequence, between *logos* and *mythos*, is not merely one of opposition, nor one of sameness either. Their identities, and therefore their relationship, are fissured and called into question (1981a, 64). See Niall Lucy's *A Derrida Dictionary* for a witty characterisation of the speech-writing relationship (2004, 118-30).

¹³ For example, in an entire chapter of his *Course in General Linguistics*, Ferdinand de Saussure tries to restrict the science of linguistics to the phonetic and audible word only (Saussure 1959, 24). In the course of his inquiry, Saussure goes as far as to argue that "language and writing are two distinct systems of signs: the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first" (24). Language, Saussure insists, has an oral tradition that is independent of writing, and it is this independence that makes a pure science of speech possible. Derrida vehemently disagrees with this hierarchy and instead argues that all that can be claimed of writing – e.g., that it is derivative and merely refers to other signs – is equally true of speech. But as well as criticising such a position for certain unjustifiable presuppositions, including the idea that we are self-identical with ourselves in 'hearing' ourselves think, Derrida also makes explicit the manner in which such a hierarchy is rendered untenable from within Saussure's own text. Most famously, Saussure is the proponent of the thesis that is commonly referred to as 'the arbitrariness of the sign', and this asserts, to simplify matters considerably, that the signifier bears no necessary relationship to that which is signified. Saussure derives numerous consequences from this position, but as Derrida points out, this notion of arbitrariness and of "unmotivated institutions" of signs, would seem to deny the possibility of any natural attachment (Derrida 1997a, 44). After all, if the sign is arbitrary and eschews any foundational reference to reality, it would seem that a certain type of sign (i.e., the spoken) could not be more natural than another (i.e., the written). However, it is precisely this idea of a natural attachment that Saussure relies upon to argue for our "natural bond" with sound (Saussure 1959, 25), and his suggestion that sounds are more intimately related to our thoughts than the written word hence runs counter to his fundamental principle regarding the arbitrariness of the sign. Saussure's notion of the sign as arbitrary was crucial to the development of post-structuralism, of which Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence is exemplary. For their similarities, see Philip Lewis, "The Poststructuralist Condition" (1982, 2-22). For a succinct clarification of Saussure's arbitrariness of the sign, see Lucy's *A Derrida Dictionary* (2004, 121-22).

only to itself.¹⁴ He suggests that “writing is not a sign of a sign, except if one says it of all signs, which would be more profoundly true” (Derrida 1997a, 43). It is this process of infinite referral and deferral, of never arriving at meaning itself, that is the notion of ‘writing’ that he controversially wants to emphasise. This is not writing narrowly conceived, as in a literal inscription upon a page, but what he terms ‘arche-writing’. Arche-writing refers to a more generalised notion of writing that insists that the breach that the written introduces between what is intended to be conveyed and what is actually conveyed, is typical of an originary breach that afflicts everything one might wish to keep sacrosanct, including notions of self-presence (and of God). This originary breach that arche-writing refers to can furthermore be separated out to reveal two claims regarding spatial differing and temporal deferring. To explicate the first of these claims, Derrida’s emphasis upon how writing differs from itself is simply to suggest that writing, and by extension all repetition, is split (differed) by the absence that makes it necessary in the first place. One example of this might be that we write something down because we may soon forget it, or to communicate something to someone who is not with us.

According to Derrida, all writing, in order to be what it is, must be able to function in the absence of every empirically determined addressee (Derrida 1988b, 7). Derrida also considers deferral to be typical of the written and this is to reinforce that the meaning of a certain text is never present, never entirely captured by any reader’s attempts to pin it down. The meaning of a text is constantly subject to the whims of the future, but when that so-called future is itself ‘present’ – if we try and circumscribe the future by reference to a specific date or event – its meaning is equally not realised, but subject to yet another future that can also never be present. The key to a text is also never present to the author, for the written always defers its meaning.¹⁵ As a consequence we cannot simply ask Derrida to explain exactly what he meant by propounding that enigmatic sentiment that has been translated as “there is nothing outside of the text” (Derrida 1997a, 158). Any explanatory words that Derrida may offer would themselves require further explanation. So, Derrida’s more generalised notion of writing, arche-writing, refers to the way in which the written is possible only on account of this ‘originary’ deferral of meaning that ensures that meaning can never be

¹⁴ Compare this point to the complexity of tracing operations of presence and identity within the Tetragrammaton wherein God re-presents himself to Moses.

¹⁵ That said, it needs to be emphasised that Derrida’s point is not so much that everything is simply semiotic or linguistic – as this is something that he explicitly denies – but that the processes of differing and deferring found within linguistic representation are symptomatic of a more general situation that afflicts everything, including the body and the perceptual.

definitively present. In conjunction with the differing aspect that we have already seen him associate with, and then extend beyond, the traditional confines of writing, he will come to describe these two overlapping processes via that most famous of neologisms: *différance*.

Différance is an attempt to conjoin the differing and deferring aspects involved in arche-writing in a term that itself plays upon the distinction between the audible and the written.¹⁶ After all, what differentiates *différance* and *différence* is inaudible, and this means that distinguishing between them actually requires the written. This problematises efforts like Saussure's (1959) which, as well as attempting to keep speech and writing apart, also suggest that writing is an almost unnecessary addition to speech. In response to such a claim, Derrida can simply point out that there is often, and perhaps even always, this type of ambiguity in the spoken word – *différence* as compared to *différance* – that demands reference to the written. If the spoken word requires the written to function properly, then the spoken is itself also always at a distance from any supposed clarity of presence. It is this originary breach that Derrida associates with the terms arche-writing and *différance*.

Différance cannot be exhaustively defined, and this is largely because of Derrida's insistence that it is "neither a word, nor a concept", as well as the fact that the meaning of the term changes depending upon the particular context in which it is being

¹⁶ One example would be the operation of the word *shibboleth* in Judges, where the pronunciation – or more precisely, the in/ability to pronounce *shibboleth* – was used as a marker for the tribe of Ephraim. Victims were singled out by their unique dialect that pronounced 'Shibboleth' as 'Sibboleth'. If you pronounced the word correctly you belonged, if you failed the test you were killed (Judg 12:5-6). This is perhaps the most well-known example of language analysis for the determination of origin. There have been many 'shibboleths' since. There was the use of 'lollapalooza' by the United States in the Pacific region during World War II. Australian troops in the Pacific were rumoured to have used 'Woolloomooloo'. Most shibboleth distinctions end in the death of the other viewed as transgressor: the example just given by the United States to detect Japanese with 'lollapalooza', and by extension, the Australian use of 'Woolloomooloo' was based on the difficulty for Japanese people in pronouncing or possibly confusing Rs with Ls. Other examples of Shibboleths include the killing of French in Bruges who could not pronounce the Flemish phrase *schilt ende vriend* (shield and friend) in 1302; and the use of the Spanish word *perejil* used to identify Haitian immigrants living along the border in the Dominican Republic, which resulted in an estimated 20,000 deaths in a government-sponsored genocide in 1937. See Derrida's essay "Shibboleth: for Paul Celan" in which he tackles several key themes in Celan's work, especially the concepts of 'date', the use of 'Shibboleth' and the practice of circumcision (Derrida 2005b, 1-64). More recent uses for shibboleth have made their way into the field of ICT, notably the Shibboleth software system used for authentication which describes itself as "among the world's most widely deployed federated identity solutions" (Shibboleth 2014). The technology may be different but the language of authentication or more accurately, separation, is made clear with its 'centralised discovery service', 'identity provider', 'metadata aggregators' and 'security advisories' working hard to create and maintain this "New Identity Platform" (ibid.). It would seem that historically as well as technologically, there are borders that should not be crossed, borders that are protected by the linguistic barricade of Shibboleth. Other barriers exist based on the in/ability to distinguish words that act as Shibboleth. For example, there is no audible difference between 'write' and 'right' in English in, for example, Tara Moss' advice on writing: 'Don't write it right, just write it – and then make it right later' (Moss in Purcell 2010). The difference is meant to be perceived by either extrapolating context, or by writing and viewing the difference. This also assumes that difference in the written form can be understood.

employed. For the moment it suffices to suggest that, according to Derrida, *différance* is typical of what is involved in arche-writing and this generalised notion of writing that breaks down the logic of the sign (Derrida 1997a, 7). The widespread conviction that the sign literally represents something that, even if not actually present, could be potentially present, is rendered impossible by arche-writing, which insists that signs always refer to yet more signs *ad infinitum*, and that there is no ultimate (covenantal) referent or foundation. This reversal of the subordinated term of an opposition accomplishes the first of deconstruction's dual strategic intents. Rather than being criticised for being derivative or secondary, writing, or at least the processes that characterise writing (i.e., *différance* and arche-writing), are ubiquitous for Derrida. Just as a piece of writing has no self-present subject to explain what every particular word means – ensuring that what is written must partly elude any individual's attempt to control it – this is equally typical of the spoken. Nothing guarantees that another person will endow the words I use with the particular meaning that I attribute to them. Even the conception of an internal monologue and the idea that we can intimately 'hear' our own thoughts in a non-contingent way is misguided, as it ignores the way that arche-writing privileges difference and a non-coincidence with oneself (Derrida 1973, 60-79).

In this respect, it also needs to be pointed out that all of deconstruction's reversals (arche-writing included) are partly captured by the edifice that they seek to overthrow. For Derrida, "one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it" (Derrida 1997a, 24), and it is important to recognise that the mere reversal of an existing metaphysical opposition does not challenge its governing frameworks and presuppositions (1978c, 280). Deconstruction hence cannot rest content with merely prioritising writing over speech, but must also accomplish the second major aspect of deconstruction's dual strategies, that being to destabilise and contaminate the opposition itself.¹⁷ Derrida must highlight that the categories that sustain and safeguard any dualism are always already disrupted and displaced. To effect this second aspect of deconstruction's strategic intents, Derrida usually coins a new term, or reworks an old one, to permanently disrupt the structure into which he has intervened; examples of this include his discussion of the *pharmakon* in Plato (drug or tincture, salutary or maleficent) and the supplement in Rousseau (the latter to be considered towards the end of this section) (see, e.g., 1981a; 1997a). To phrase the problem in slightly different terms, Derrida's argument is that in examining a binary opposition, deconstruction

¹⁷ Theophoric names can be thought of as examples of this kind of contamination. Names such as Israel, Jael, and Elijah contain 'El' not 'Yhwh'. See my discussion on theophoric names in Chapter Two (75n30, 85-86).

manages to expose a trace. This is not a trace of the oppositions that have since been deconstructed. On the contrary, the trace is a rupture within metaphysics, a pattern of incongruities where the metaphysical rubs up against the non-metaphysical. The trace does not appear as such (Derrida 1997a, 65), but the logic of its path in a text can be mined by a deconstructive intervention and hence brought to the fore.

The logic of the supplement is an important aspect of *Of Grammatology*. A supplement is something that, allegedly secondarily, comes to serve as an aid to something ‘original’ or ‘natural’. Writing is itself an example of this structure, for as Derrida points out, “if supplementarity is a necessarily indefinite process, writing is the supplement *par excellence* since it proposes itself as the supplement of the supplement, sign of a sign, taking the place of a speech already significant” (Derrida 1997a, 281). Other examples of the supplement might be the use of birth control or even masturbation (153).¹⁸ What is notable about both of these examples is the ambiguity that ensures that what is supplementary can always be interpreted in two ways. For example, our society’s use of birth control precautions might be interpreted as suggesting that our ‘natural’ way is lacking and that the contraceptive pill, or condom hence replaces a fault in nature. On the other hand, it might also be argued that such precautions merely add on to and enrich our ‘natural’ way. It is always ambiguous or, more accurately, ‘undecidable’ whether the supplement adds itself and “is a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence”, or whether “the supplement supplements ... adds only to replace ... represents and makes an image ... its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness” (144). Ultimately, Derrida suggests that the supplement is both of these things, accretion and substitution¹⁹ (200), which means that the supplement is “not a signified more than a signifier, a

¹⁸ This is not just some rhetorical suggestion that has no concrete significance in deconstruction. While Rousseau consistently laments the frequency of his masturbation in *The Confessions*, Derrida argues that “it has never been possible to desire the presence ‘in person’, before this play of substitution and the symbolic experience of auto-affection” (Derrida 1997a, 154). By this, Derrida means that this supplementary masturbation that ‘plays’ between presence and absence (e.g., the image of the absent Therese that is evoked by Rousseau) is that which allows us to conceive of being present and fulfilled in sexual relations with another at all. In a sense, masturbation is ‘originary’ and, according to Derrida, this situation applies to all sexual relations. All erotic relations have their own supplementary aspect in which we are never present to some ephemeral ‘meaning’ of sexual relations, but always involved in some form of representation. Even if this does not literally take the form of imagining another in the place of, or supplementing the ‘presence’ that is currently with us, and even if we are not always acting out a certain role, or faking certain pleasures, for Derrida, such representations and images are the very conditions of desire and of enjoyment (1997a, 156).

¹⁹ I have detailed how substitution operated to delegitimise Asherah/Asherim in Chapters Two and Three. The accretion and substitution that Derrida writes of in *Of Grammatology* with regards to the operation of substitution are palimpsestuous in their layering or covering over.

representer than a presence, a writing than a speech” (315). It comes before all such modalities.

Of Structures, Signs and Play

In another modulation of these ideas, dismantling the notion that there is any necessary, *a priori*, transcendent centre of any structure, Derrida announces an event which he terms a rupture in the concept of structure:

Up to the event which I wish to mark out and define, structure ... has always been neutralized or reduced ... by a process of giving it a center ... The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure ... but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure. (Derrida 1978c, 278)

For the purposes of this dissertation, then, my concern with the processes “of giving it a center” is with the socio-political processes of giving God as centre, where God’s function as centre has indeed been to orient and organise human activity. The very ‘nature(s)’ ascribed to the character of God(s), the organising principle attributed to a/the deity of creation and instantiated through covenant, works to limit the *play* of the structure of human activity. God operates as a self-referencing mechanism, going through the motions of calibration (modifying human behaviour, overseeing the universe, inside/outside of time). But of course, it is a clever illusion. There is no centre as we have tended to think ‘centre’ or ‘God’ or ‘nation’. Not only that, the location of the centre – its ‘where’ – remains in question:

[i]t has always been thought that the center ... constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. (Derrida 1978c, 279)²⁰

Whilst it has long been thought – and used – to comprise and determine the totality of a structure, the centre is a posited entity with no necessary ontological status. Put more

²⁰ Here it may be helpful to remember the paradoxical notion of a divinity which is both *immanent* and *transcendent*, present within creation yet not contained by it – *within* the structure and *outside* it.

simply, the centre is a function of the way we perceive and organise the data of the sensuous manifold or the universe (*phenomena* or a lived experience as opposed to *noumena*). We think and in so doing we organise; we posit structure. We conceive order and rationality. We create God and the cosmos in our own image. This concept of a centre, of a centrally determinative and constitutive reality, has, of course, as already detailed, been long conceived of as a *presence*.²¹ This theological and mythological grounding of thought is clear when Derrida (reprising Heidegger) reminds us that:

The entire history of the concept of structure ... must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively ... the center receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix ... is the determination of Being as a *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence—*eidos, arche, telos, energia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) [the Biblical term for presence – meaning the direct presence of Divinity, and the indirect presence through the Scriptural word—*parousia*, also fits here], *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth. (Derrida 1978c, 279-280)

The rupture of which Derrida speaks came about “when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought ... [when] ... It became necessary to think both the law which somehow governed the desire for a center in the constitution of structure, and the process of signification which orders the displacements and substitutions for this law of central presence” (Derrida 1978c, 280). Derrida diagnoses this rupture, reprising Nietzsche and Hegel, as a part of the long process of ‘losing faith’ in traditional moralities, images of the divine, and conceptions of humanity’s relationship to the universe which marked the transition from Romanticism to Modernism.²² A universe which had seemed ordered, cared for, and maintained by some transcendent figure or principle, is no longer so. What had once seemed a total experience of the cosmos is now fragmentary, incomplete, and fictional.²³

²¹ A presence that has been traditionally conceived of as the Divine, the Unmoved Mover, the God who is eternal and whose attributes do not change.

²² As opposed to the grounding and centring of faith that occurred as a result of codifying and canonising biblical texts. See, for example, the ecumenical Council of Nicaea’s promulgation of early canon law in 325 CE (Hazlett ed. 1995).

²³ I highlighted this fictional and fragmentary experience in Chapter Five with Nietzsche’s much misunderstood phrase ‘God is dead’, viewed as one such rupture where the traditional articulation of God and subjectivity stumbles and is open to question and further possibility than a logic of the One and Only. Of course, Nietzsche’s thinking (and indeed philosophy) is not the only disruption to God, science has

Derrida thus writes of an end to totalisation, an end to the belief that we can contain the entire sensuous manifold in our conceptual structures: “If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field—that is, language and a finite language—excludes totalization” (Derrida 1978c, 289). This field is said to exclude totalisation because there is “something missing from it; a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions” (289). If the infinite sensuous manifold is not the field, but the finitude of language is the field, then play, substitution, supplementarity, and *différance* necessarily preclude a centre to the field. No language – even one as large and flexible as English, much less one as relatively small as biblical Hebrew or as circumscribed as French²⁴ – can contain within itself the infinite richness of the sensuous phenomena available. No language can completely structure sensuous reality; therefore, no language is, on those terms, capable of having a centre which is necessarily, transcendentally and – in its most complete sense – ontologically *present*.

Derrida articulates two choices at the end of his essay, two:

interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man ... that being who ... has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play. (Derrida 1978c, 292)

An echo of Nietzsche reverberates in these last words. In banishing the dream of presence what is being banished? What kind of clarity is being gained, and at what cost? Perhaps only the notion of a provided centre is banished, thus reaffirming the notion of a self-created, self-maintained, and necessarily provisional (self)centre. Noting that the deepest desire in the western metaphysical tradition has been to locate some fixed permanent centre, some ground – whether we think of this as the “transcendental or privileged signified”, or a presence or a self-presence in its full transparency and plenitude (Derrida 1978c, 281) – and that this is true also of both the positively and

also contributed to a destabilisation of foundational aspects of God. Technological advances in image and data collection, and analysis across fields such as geology, paleoclimatology, archaeology and physics, have, for instance, disrupted the logic of a One and Only thinking. The Large Hadron Collider ring at CERN, and the speculation around the Higgs Boson or ‘God particle’ (essentially a gateway to a new physics) are a case in point.

²⁴ The *Académie française* are official custodians of the French language charged since its inception in 1635 with preserving and protecting French (Académie française 2015). More recently, the Toubon Laws (1994) were enacted to assist in regulating the use of and disseminating French in order to mitigate the effects of the English-speaking world (Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication 2015).

negatively inflected (onto)theological traditions insofar as both construe the narrative of history as being centred upon and framed by a God (or presencing) that is itself “beyond the reach of play” (289), Derrida points out that there is no “centered structure”, no “fundamental ground” that is beyond question (279).²⁵ There is here (always) play, and this means that in interpreting (biblical) texts there is always:

something missing ... a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. One could say ... that this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of supplementarity. One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center’s place in its absence – this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*. The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that it is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified. (Derrida 1978c, 289)

What these points make clear, I propose, are once again important challenges to desired presentations of God as the One and Only. God, when mapped in the terms of the strange logics of supplementarity and *différance*, is always disrupted and haunted by that which exceeds and keeps its signification from being finalised. God is – as has been discussed in earlier chapters – always supplemented not only by remnants of other deities which have been overwritten, but by (his) covenants and speaking. Further illustrations of such play as both inextricable from and informing God’s presencing can also be seen in the next three sections: naming and identity, absence and appeal, and the manifestation of the hidden. In these sections, to be more specific, my objective is to show how presencing attempts in the monotheistic texts and traditions are (also) informed through the logics of play, *différance*, and supplementarity.

²⁵ I note here the large actual distinction and the perceived continuities between Derrida and Paul de Man. Academic criticism has become accustomed to categorising them together under the rubric of deconstruction, and there are obvious likenesses: the emphasis on close reading, the concern with epistemology, the background in Heidegger and Freud, the sceptical disposition (see, e.g., J. H. Miller 2014; Hartman 1979). But de Man – like Hegel – is pre-eminently a dialectical thinker. He charts all discourse with polar terms: blindness and insight, metaphor and metonymy, theory and undecidability (see, e.g., de Man 1971). Derrida, although he is attuned to both the power metaphysics has to recuperate and normalise antithetical gestures like his and the desire for the possibility of a full unbinding from transcendental ‘truth’, contends that both slip into undecidability when they try and maintain their borders and identities.

Naming and Identity

As has already been noted, not only is a name intrinsically related to identity²⁶ but, in the (biblical) world, deities – or people for that matter – do not exist without a name. An ancient text from the Nineteenth Dynasty in Egypt (ca. 1350-1200 BCE), “The God and His Unknown Name of Power”, illustrates the significance of the name. In this document, the Goddess Isis says to the God Re, “Say to me your name, my divine father, for a man lives when one recites his name” (*ANET*, 12-14). Jacob’s struggle with a divine being at Jabbok also illustrates the power inherent in naming. Here he struggles all night with an unidentified divine being who, to escape Jacob before sunrise, wrenches Jacob’s hip. Jacob holds firm, however, and when the being says “Let me go”, Jacob first requires a blessing. The divine being asks after his name and blesses Jacob by bestowing the name Israel on him. Jacob also asks for the being’s name but it refuses (Gen 32:24-31). Not only existence but also power is inherent in names, and their pronunciation can be a source of blessing or disaster.²⁷ Such a notion is also related to the stipulation in the Decalogue, “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD [Yhwh] your God [Elohim], for the LORD [Yhwh] will not acquit anyone who misuses his name” (Ex 20:7). Thus, whilst a person’s name may be said to give ordinary (ordering) significance to the bearer, to be named and given identity, the personal name of God may be deemed to take on extraordinary significance.

In the Hebrew Bible it is clear that it is the naming of God as ground that in turn enables God to ground, name and sustain a very particular ‘reality’, to the point that whatever falls outside its conceptual system – whatever is not ‘named’ as such – tends to be deemed unnatural, undesirable or even heretical. For instance, recall Genesis

²⁶ We can think here of ‘John Doe’ as a moniker for the unidentified and therefore unclaimed person.

²⁷ The narrative of Jacob wrestling with a divine being is a good case in point for blessings and disasters insofar as Jacob unknowingly fights with God (Ex 4:24-26). The narratives include a complicated word play on the name of Jacob (*ya’aqob*), the river Jabbok (*yabboq*) and *wrestled* (*wayye’abeq* in v.24). Jacob is so strong or persistent (29:10) that he is winning until his divine opponent dislocates Jacob’s hip. The divine being has to vanish before sunrise – a mark of the antiquity of the tradition on which the story is based. In v. 28, Jacob’s new name reflects a new self: he is no longer the “supplanter” (25:26; 27:36) of Esau, but Israel (35:10), which probably meant “El rules” (with El being the head of the Northwestern Semitic pantheon). In versions of this biblical narrative, Jacob’s new name is interpreted to mean “the one who strives with God” (Cf. Hos 12:3-4). *And with humans* refers to Jacob’s strife with Esau (Jacob’s twin brother who was tricked out of his father’s blessing by his brother and who sold his birthright to Jacob in Gen 25, 27) and Laban (variously positioned as ‘an Aramaen’ (*arami*) and/or ‘a deceiver’ (*rama’i*) in Gen 24:29-60; 31, the *Passover Haggadah* and *Genesis Rabbah* 70:19). In this way, the community of biblical Israel, as descendants of this god-wrestler, is depicted as a group that successfully strives with God and humans. The divine being refuses to give his name, lest Jacob gain power over him by possessing that name (v.29). The incident concludes with Jacob/Israel calling the place Peniel (*Penuel*, the “face of El”), and with him declaring that he has seen the face of God and lived (v.30, this is a reference to the *God of Seeing* or the *God Who Sees*, *Beer-lahai-roi* in Gen 16:13 and earlier literary traditions).

where “In the beginning ... [God says] ... “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness” (Gen 1:1-5). This is the primeval history in which God pronounces his will and it is accomplished. A short textual analysis will better demonstrate what is in play here. These first five verses introduce two important themes: the goodness of creation (indicated by the blessing ‘and it was good’), and the idea that creation is no more than is accomplished through God’s separating, ordering, and naming of the universe. More precisely, the ‘reality’ presented in ‘the book’ is achieved through attributing powerful, proper names to those entities who actively affirm and work towards their own and other stakes of identity and legitimation. These are the *named*. By the same token, there remain those that are to be worked against, those that are presented in the dominant narrative ‘reality’ of the Hebrew Bible as the unrepresentable and undesirable, those needing to be supplanted, substituted for. These are the *not-named*, and the idea is that in not being named they remain unimportant, unobtrusive, voiceless, hidden shadows that can in no way upset the world-view created and legitimated.²⁸ In other words, ‘naming’ in the Hebrew Bible is an establishment procedure²⁹ that not only legitimates the god Yahweh as sovereign and the One and Only God, but functions thereby both as a silencing and a supplement.

On what basis can God so name (and supplant) reality? This is based on God’s position as ground, centre and certitude, a position that is typically understood to be set out, once and for all, in the Hebrew Bible.³⁰ The question that I want to pursue, however, is whether this position is really as fixed, as immobile, as beyond play as it

²⁸ Ronald S. Hendel’s (1992) “Worldmaking in Ancient Israel” illustrates the case of creating and maintaining world-views in an ancient context. What is particularly interesting about Hendel’s work here is that he traces dominant social and religious trends involved in the creation of an Israelite world out of an antecedent Canaanite world. Although the context is ancient Israel, his ideas apply equally well to the work of a Liberation Theology from the Pacific Islands in that the structure (if not parts of the content itself) involves the construction of new world-views out of old ones.

²⁹ Establishment procedures and policies organise, hierarchise and ratify information, systems and institutions. They categorise and place things and people in very specific sites, canonising them in effect. An establishment procedure, here, sets out a prescription of some kind as normative, as the way the world ‘really’ is.

³⁰ I have already delineated the problem inherent in language, particularly with regards the use of ‘Old Testament’ and ‘New Testament’ in my Introduction 10n5. It is worth reiterating – because of the pressure language exerts when wielded – that Christianity functions in a way that ‘supersedes’ the Hebrew Bible and becomes the ‘New Testament’. Standing in relation (and in tension) to the ‘New’, the Hebrew Bible acts as a foundation or Rosetta stone for the three faiths of the book. Clearly, supplementarity is at work here in the movements between ‘Old’ and ‘New’, even though a logic of the One and Only espoused by the various monotheistic discourses examined and critiqued earlier in this dissertation would try to maintain that what a god decrees (the first time, in Genesis) should hold (that is, not be overturned by the ‘New’). In following the logic of the Christianity tradition once is not enough, so a Christian Testament comes into play to supplement the Hebrew Bible which gets relegated to ‘Old Testament’ by the ‘New’. Jesus embodies literally a supplement of God (as Son/Sun), as does/can Mary too (following Kearns 2008; 2001).

has typically been seen. Here I will start (again) with the naming of God as the One and Only in the *Shema* of Deuteronomy, where we come across the call rendered in the NRSV as “Hear O Israel, the LORD [Yhwh] Our God [Elohim] the LORD [Yhwh] is One” (Deut 6:4) where the phrase ‘the LORD’ has been substituted for the name Yhwh and ‘God’ for Elohim in English translations. This instance, however, is an example of a paradoxical call insofar as it uses the name to distinguish Yahweh as one from all others. It surely does not make much sense that the One and Only God needs a name. What could the One and Only God be confused with? A brief textual analysis of naming in Exodus will further unpack the problematic inherent in the One God’s name(s). In Exodus we find God complying with the request of Moses for his name in the dialogue at the burning bush. Further, God is identified in two more ways in the text of Exodus. Moses is at first told to say to his people, “I will be [*Ehyeh*] has sent me to you” (Ex 3:14); supplemented by a second articulation, “‘Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you’: This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations” (Ex 3:15).³¹ The first appellation, *Ehyeh* or ‘I will be’, is nebulous but suggests that the name Yahweh might be linked to the root *hayah*, ‘to be, become’. The supplementary second name – referring to the Yahweh of the ancestors – seems to fit in better with the overall narrative development of the story of Exodus. The name Yahweh has already been used by the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and is now ‘re-introduced’ to Moses to lend legitimacy to supplanting the claim of covenantal relationship.

The mysterious declaration of Exodus 3:14: *אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה* or *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh* – which can also be translated as; ‘I am who I am’, or ‘I am what I am’, or ‘I will

³¹ As I have previously discussed, the name revealed to Moses is known as the Tetragrammaton (four letters) because it is written with four letters in Hebrew: *יהוה*. In transliteration, the name appears as YHWH or Yhwh and occurs in the Hebrew Bible as well as in other ancient Near Eastern inscriptions from the biblical period. Ancient biblical manuscripts were basically consonantal, written without vowel signs. When vowels were added to the consonantal text in the early medieval period (seventh to ninth centuries CE) by the Masoretes (Jewish scholars who sought to preserve the traditional text of the Hebrew Bible), the four consonants of the divine name were left unvocalised. They refrained from adding vowels because, at that time, Jews considered the name of God so sacred they did not pronounce it. Doing so might inadvertently cause them to violate the injunction not to ‘make wrongful use’ of God’s name. Thus, when they read aloud from the Tanakh, they substitute the word Adonai (*adonay*), which is a term of respectful address meaning ‘my Lord’ or ‘the Lord’. This practice has continued among Jews to the present. In order to signify this substitution without removing the actual letters of God’s name, the Masoretes added the vowels from Adonai to the existing consonants. The result was a hybrid form that made it appear, incorrectly, that God’s name would have been Yehova or Jehovah, which is how it has often been pronounced since the sixteenth century. The original pronunciation of the four-letter name of God has in fact been lost. However, current scholarship suggests that the original pronunciation would have been ‘Yahweh’. For an introduction to the Masorah, see Kelley, Mynatt and Crawford’s (1998) *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

be who I will be', or 'I will be what I will be'³² – invites us to search in it for the meaning of the divine name although it could well also be a denial of such a foundation. Following the iteration of supplementarity, it is possible to see how this ambivalent self might later lead to the God of the Christian tradition. Indeed, this could be the God of negative theologians, a Yahweh as *elusive* presence or as never fully revealed: I am so great and incomparable that I cannot be articulated in a single term, cannot be expressed by a single name, or image.³³ Perhaps the divine name is to be found in the verb *to be*, *become*, or its meaning has to do with the idea of being, although the declaration could just as well be an assertion of the freedom of God to be what or who it chooses to be or to be what or who we choose to construct. In addition to these uncertainties, there is another possibility at work in, for example, Exodus. When God reveals himself to Moses, he supplements his revelation with the claim "I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob". Moses encounters a God who is already known. Here, then, God has an existing identity and history in the memory of the Hebrew people according to the text. This identification, however, is insufficient for Moses, and he raises the following question: "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?" (Ex 3:13). One implication here is that the tradition may have been ambiguous, more than one name may have circulated, and indeed more than one deity may have been honoured (as was historically the case, see my Chapters Two and Three). In this case, as Moses notes here, a name is essential to the possibility of a centred, cohesive, and continuous identity. Some of these ambiguities have already been drawn upon earlier in the dissertation, however, it is worth remembering they can be found throughout biblical texts. They are the aporia hidden in plain view in texts such as Exodus 3 and 6.

There is a question, however, as to which name is being used, and to what end. The name Yahweh (יהוה) appears 6,830 times in the Hebrew Bible, and is the name of the official deity of ancient Israel, both in the northern kingdom of Israel and in the southern state of Judah.³⁴ However, the usual word for 'god' in the Hebrew Bible is

³² Also see Rosenzweig and Buber's translation of this phrase as discussed by me in the previous chapter.

³³ From Anselm's *Proslogion* through to work by Emmanuel Levinas and, more recently, by Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo, negative theology, at its most basic, may be viewed as a plea for the plenary presence of God. Whilst Nietzsche would perhaps characterise the linguistics of negative theology as a ruse, the question can be pursued further by examining Derrida's account of God's name, an issue of particular interest to him in that terms of *différance* and 'trace' intrinsic to his own work have been identified (erroneously, he believes) with negative theology (Derrida 1992c, 74).

³⁴ Other ancient Near Eastern materials or 'extra-biblical' materials in which Yahweh's name occurs are the Mesha stela of the tenth century: "I took the vessels of Yhwh and dragged them before Chemosh"

Elohim (אלהים), and this term occurs some 2,570 times. Even more problematically, the term *Elohim* refers either to a plurality of deities such as the Hosts of Heaven or to the divine assembly or to a single being. There are also many other names utilised for God – for instance, *El* (אל), *Eloah* (אלה), and *Elyon* (עליון). In addition, it is worth noting both that the god *El* was the original god of ancient Israel, and that the name ‘Israel’ includes the theophoric name *El* and not *Yahweh* in it. Further to these names, expressions such as *adonay* (אדוני) were common in the liturgy as well as in everyday life. This is literally ‘the LORD’ or ‘my LORD’ in its ancient Near Eastern context, and is rendered not much later in the Septuagint as *κυριος*, and still later by Jews as *Ha Shem* or ‘The Name’.³⁵ These names – *Adonai*, *Kyrios*, and *Ha-Shem* – are thus all substitutes for *Yahweh*.³⁶

Existing concurrently with these practices of substitution in the Hebrew Bible is another practice – introduced in Chapter Three – through which *Yahweh* subsumes the title and roles of other ancient Semitic deities of the region: *El* (אל), *Elohim* (אלהים), *Eloah* (אלה), *El Shaddai* (אל שדי), *El-Roi* (אל רוי) and *Baal* (בעל).³⁷ Indeed, the naming of *Yahweh*, very clearly exemplifies an overwriting of and the substituting for the presence of other deities and diverse religious activities that made up the worldview of Israel and Judah, including the worship of *Asherah* (*Yahweh*’s consort), the goddesses *Anat* and *Astarte*, *Molech*’s cult of child sacrifice, the *Rephaim* or cult of the dead, *Marduk*, temple prostitution, and solar and lunar veneration.³⁸ Given this plurality

(*ANET*, 32); the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscription of the ninth-eighth centuries, and the Lachish and Arad ostraca of the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. See my discussions of these materials and some of their implications in Chapters Two and Three.

³⁵ Ancient translations of the Bible followed the reverential Hebraic treatment of the divine name by rendering it ‘LORD’. The Septuagint reads *YHWH* as *Kyrios* and the Latin (Vulgate) as *Dominus*. Most English translations continue this practice by substituting LORD for the divine name. While this practice is respectful within religious communities it is also problematic.

³⁶ Not to belabour the point, but the term ‘*Yahweh*’, as explained previously, is also very much a modern, scholastic substitution for *ywhw*, the original pronunciation of which has been lost. Hence, the use of *Yahweh* is just as problematic as other names invested with significance. My use of ‘*Yahweh*’ (and other such derivations, substitutions, and embellishments) is thus drawing attention to the problematic inherent in this meaning.

³⁷ See for example Psalm 29, originally a hymn to the God of the storm, and likely a Canaanite hymn of praise appropriated by Israel as a prayer for rain for the feast of Tabernacles. It begins with “heavenly beings”, literally the ‘sons of Gods’ or ‘sons of gods’, subordinate deities in the heavenly assembly (see Ex 15:11; Ps 82:1; 89: 5-7). Also see Handy (1994, 47, 89-95), Mark S. Smith (2002), and Trotter (2001b, 127-30, 155).

³⁸ The worship of *Molech*, a Canaanite deity, was practiced in the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem (2 Kgs 23:10; Jer 32:35). The term may refer to a type of offering or child sacrifice (Lev 18:21, 20:3). Though all *Molech* worship as understood by the Bible might involve child sacrifice, not every case of child sacrifice is *Molech* worship (e.g., 2 Kgs 3:27; Isa 66:3). Whilst the *Rephaim* are described as a race of giants in some biblical passages (Gen 14:5, 15:20; Deut 2:10-11, 2:18-21, 3:11; Josh 12:4, 13:12, 15:8, 17:15, 18:16; 2 Sam 5:18, 5:22, 23:13; 1 Chr 11:15, 14:9, 20:4), for the most part the terms ‘*Rephaim*’ refers to the cult of the dead, a form of ancestor worship (Isa 14:9, 26:14, 26:19; Ps 88:11; Prov 2:18,

of deities, how is the great articulation of the monotheistic faiths founded on the affirmation of the *Shema Yisrael* in Judaism located in Deuteronomy that asserts “Yahweh is One” (Deut 6:4-5)?³⁹ If, however, we turn to the *shema* more closely, we actually do not find the statement ‘Hear O Israel, Yahweh Our God Yahweh is One’. Instead the text reads: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד or *shema yisrael yahweh eloheinu yahweh echad*. This is translated into English as: ‘Hear O Israel! Yahweh-Elohim, Yahweh is One’. In other words, Yahweh was never just Yahweh but always also Elohim. Yahweh was always already more than One. God, then, even at this level of its own textual naming, is by no means the One and Only God envisioned by adherents of monotheism in either its ancient or modern scholarly configurations.⁴⁰

Finally, to return again to the beginning of this section, it should be remembered that naming always indicates a privileged access, a mode of access and address that is essential in the instance of Exodus, for instance, for not only prayer, but also power. After all, if Moses had spoken in the name of an anonymous deity, the Hebrew people would hardly consider him to have had an authoritative experience. However Yahweh’s innovation of the patriarchal promises of land, descendants and blessing – promises that also supplement his actual presence – thus both does and does not establish that Yahweh and the God of the patriarchs are one and the same God. And yet, as discussed earlier in this chapter, this paradigm of historical renewal via supplementarity – the substitution of God’s presence by land, descendants and blessing – strives to maintain ‘future’ obligations, identity and a prescriptive behaviour for Israel. One final point: the Greek name for this text of *exodus aigyptou* or ‘road out of Egypt’ itself seems a misnomer. The Hebrew *wē ʾēllē šēmôt* or ‘these are the names’, seems far more attuned to the text’s foregrounding of certain realities through naming.⁴¹

9:18, 21:16; Job 26:5. On the role of the dead and burial customs in ancient Israelite society and the cultures of the ancient Levant generally, see Elizabeth Bloch-Smith’s (1992) *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead*; Trotter’s (2012) “The Death of the אֱלֹהִים in Psalm 82”.

³⁹ The implications of this affirmation are wide as are its correlates, the *credo in unum deum* from the Apostle’s Creed and *lā ilāha illā-llāh, wa*, the Islamic *shahada* where ‘there is no God but Allah’. See Mark S. Smith’s (2002) work on the early history of God for a detailed discussion of the development of monotheism in the context of the ancient Near East, and Albertz’s (2003) *Israel in exile* provides an excellent analysis of the exilic period so crucial to the formation of biblical literature, as does Edelman (ed., 1996b) in *The Triumph of Elohim*, and Cook (2004) in *The Social roots of biblical Yahwism*.

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion on the history of textual transmission see Würthwein’s (1995) excellent discussion on manuscripts and sigla associated with the Hebrew Bible. For special attention to exegetical aspects of textual transmission and literary issues see Emanuel Tov’s (2002; 2001) authoritative work on the problem of the original shape of the biblical text.

⁴¹ The Hebrew is often abbreviated simply to *Šēmôt* or ‘Names’.

Absence and Appeal

The second set of Tablets could not be like the first, being born of breakage ... God was forced by His people to repeat Himself ... Thus the law is built on resemblance ... And the book, on the hope of resembling, the hidden book. (Jabés 1990, 64)

Biblical narratives on the writing and breaking of the tablets of stone in Exodus also make an interesting case in point with which to better understand the deferrals always already at play within the speech/writing tension, repetition and absence:

When God [He] finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant [treaty], tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. (Ex 31:18)

The tablets were the work of God [Elohim], and the writing was the writing of God [Elohim], engraved upon the tablets. (Ex 32:16)

The LORD [Yhwh] said to Moses, “Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke. (Ex 34:1)

The LORD [Yhwh] said to Moses: Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel ... And he [Moses] wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments [words]. (Ex 34:27-28)

This is part of the larger narrative arc of covenant violation and renewal in Exodus 25-40 in which a series of ‘repetitions’ occur after numerous instances of Israel being proclaimed to be “a stiff-necked people” who run off after other god(s) (Ex 32:9). Three chapters describing the infamous golden calf incident and its aftermath seem to interrupt the narrative of the instructions for the tabernacle, and the grandeur and holiness of the prescriptive materials of the Exodus text give way to the dramatic account of an interlude of apostasy and renewal (Ex 31-34). Scholars have long sought to understand this apparent break in the flow of the tabernacle texts. One hypothesis about this textual aporia looked more closely at the theo-political situation of a people in exile. Taking into account a community in exile, or possibly post-exile, the overall message that a God’s Chosen people could sin and remain in relationship with God as he renewed the covenant with them must have been a particularly powerful if not popular response in times of post/exilic crises. According to this hypothesis, the redactors included the calf

episode – perhaps based on the polemic against Jeroboam 1 and his golden calves in 1 Kings 12:25-33 – to reassure the people of God’s abiding pact with them despite their iniquity. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the genre of temple-building accounts in the ancient Near East, of which the tabernacle texts are an example, sometimes exhibit a pattern in which the god’s command to build is followed by a rebellion against the builder (Hurowitz 1992, 111).

Although they present a fairly coherent narrative, Exodus 32-34 are an amalgam of older oral and literary traditions commonly found in ancient Near Eastern traditions. For example, they contain different views about how God’s presence was manifest and about where the tabernacle/tent was located. Perhaps most striking is that the account of the covenant in Chapter 34 seems to depict it as an innovation rather than the restoration of a previous covenant, although 34:11-26 is a rearranged version of 23:12-33. There are also repetitions, discrepancies, and *non-sequiturs* similar to those of other narrative sections of Exodus. It seems certain that several sources including older, oral traditions, which no longer can be isolated, have been incorporated into the present narrative, probably by priestly redactors.⁴²

Readings of these chapters are ambiguous. The beginning of Chapter 34 sets out that the people had become unhappy due to the absence of both their leader and of visible assurance of their god’s presence. This anxiety and impatience led to Aaron’s fabrication of the golden image of a calf⁴³ from jewelry donated by both men and women, and also an altar for both burnt and well-being offerings. This turn of events has aroused extensive discussion.⁴⁴ Were the people asking literally for a god? Here the NRSV translation of ‘make gods for us’ in 32:1 (and v.23) is misleading, for the Hebrew just as readily allows for the rendering ‘make a god for us’. Or were they seeking something to indicate divine presence? Were they asking for a representation of – a supplement for – Yahweh? Or were they seeking an image of any god who would do

⁴² Frank Frick (2003) provides an introduction to the structure and composition of the Pentateuch in his *A Journey Through the Hebrew Scriptures*. *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* provides a more comprehensive survey of the current state of scholarship associated with the Bible with regards to literary theory, textual criticism and linguistics (Rogerson and Lieu, eds. 2006). *Methods of Biblical Interpretation* also provides a wealth of concisely expressed information on methodology with a detailed history of exegesis and useful bibliographies (Hayes 2004).

⁴³ More likely a young bull or ox (see Ps 106:19-20). See Mark S. Smith (2002) for a solid background on Israelite and Canaanite cultic practices such as bull worship. The work of Keel (1997, 233-35, 310), and Keel and Uehlinger (1998) provide extensive analysis of the iconographic evidence in the ancient Near East. See, in particular, “Israel: God and Bull and Other Baal Figures” (1998, 191-97).

⁴⁴ See commentaries on Exodus by Childs (1979), Dozeman (2009), Fretheim (1991) and Meyers (2005). In her commentary on Exodus, Meyers (2005, xv) argues that it is arguably the most important book in the Bible, as it presents the defining features of Israel’s identity: memories of the past marked by hardship and escape, a binding covenant with the God who chooses Israel, and the establishment of the life of a community and the guidelines for sustaining it.

what Yahweh has promised? Or, is it possible that they simply wanted an image of the absent Moses, God's messenger and sometimes substitute (as the one who was credited in 32:1, 7-8 for bringing the Israelites out of Egypt)? In addition, the festival to be held at the altar is for Yahweh (Ex 32:5), so they do not seem to be rejecting Yahweh. Was the calf itself a theriomorphism (representation of a deity having the form of an animal)? Or, like the cherubim, was it a throne or pedestal on which the invisible presence of a god rests? Note that the verb 'bow down' appears in both the Decalogue's stipulation about images (Ex 20:4-6) and in 32:8 (where it is translated by the NRSV as 'worshipped'). Can it be that God condemned the golden calf not because it signified the worship of other gods but because it violated the prohibition against bowing down to and serving images of living beings? None of these questions can be resolved with certainty. Whatever the 'meaning' of the narrative, the presence of the bull as the problematic animal can be understood. The bull was a symbol of divine strength, energy, fertility, and even leadership in the ancient Near Eastern world; in ancient Near Eastern art, gods sometimes are depicted standing on bulls and frequently wear horned headdresses.⁴⁵

The responses of God, Moses, and Aaron in this episode are also unexpected, shifting, and disturbing. God would send a great plague upon the people to destroy them all; divine wrath burning hot and consuming them (Ex 32:10-11) is idiomatic language for feverish and fatal disease (as in 32:35; cf. Num 11:33). God furthermore makes a surprising request, "now let me alone" (Ex 32:10). Moses' response is one of protest and of appeal in a remarkable reversal of the usual call to remember, in which the people are enjoined to recall the past or when God proclaims what has been done in the past. Moses here calls upon God to "remember" the ancestors (Ex 32:13). The implication is that the covenant with the ancestors was unconditional, unlike the Sinai one, and that God is bound to honour the promise of land and descendants.⁴⁶ Divine decisions, especially this radical resolution to destroy the people bonded to God, can apparently be revoked. God can be both punitive and merciful. If human remembrance involves activity, so too does divine recollection. God takes Moses' arguments seriously and reverses his decision to annihilate the people (Ex 32:14). Arguing with God is not Moses' only response. Coming down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant/treaty – themselves arguably supplements for God's presence – inscribed on both sides by God (by the finger of God) only to see the celebration of the golden calf,

⁴⁵ See *ANESTP*, figs. 486, 498, 537, 538.

⁴⁶ See the discussion of covenant in my Chapters One, Two and especially Three.

Moses smashes the tablets. The narrative thus presents another intercessory attempt by Moses, in this instance seeking to avert disaster by making atonement to God for the sins of the people. In response God instructs Moses to follow the angel who will lead the people onward, away from Sinai, refusing to stay with the people on the journey. The angel in the narratives is hence not a manifestation of God but a separate emissary, with God's direct presence presented as lethal rather than protective. Problematically, God's withdrawal seems to negate the whole set of tabernacle instructions, which are meant to secure divine presence. Is Moses' punishment a supplement for the evils of the people?

Also contained in these chapters is a brief account of a tent shrine (Ex 33:7-11), containing one of the several versions in this section of how God's presence was manifested to Moses. Here Moses is depicted as pitching the tent shrine, which he calls the "tent of meeting", by himself outside the camp. He would go there to meet with God while the people watched from the entrances of their own tents, knowing that the cloud at the entrance of God's tent signified divine presence (without the cloud, God would not be available to meet with Moses). This differs from the conception of the tabernacle as a portable structure that regulates (regularises?) God's presence. Here Moses also encounters God in a most intimate way – "face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Ex 33:11).⁴⁷ Remarkably, in this passage, unlike others that relate Moses' direct encounters with God, he sees God directly rather than as via a supplementary presence made manifest in divine glory or cloud.

Profound anxiety about God's presence connects this tent-of-meeting passage with what precedes it and with the ensuing dialogue between Moses and God (Ex 33:12-23). The people have responded with mourning to God's refusal to be present on their journey (Ex 33:4), Moses again challenges the divine decision. He pleads with God to be present, directly or indirectly, and to guide the people as they continue their journey. In a telling reversal of the concern early in the book of Exodus about the name of God, now it is Moses' name that is known by God (vv. 12, 17). Moses offers an argument claiming that his special relationship with God empowers him to offer an ultimatum: the people will not continue their journey if God will not agree to be with

⁴⁷ The same expression is used in Deuteronomy 34:10, whereas in Numbers 12:6-8 it is said that God communicated with Moses "mouth to mouth" (JPS), "face to face" (NRSV). This figurative language works to convey the pre-eminence and uniqueness of Moses as a prophetic figure who experiences a special mode of revelation. The experience is personal and direct, not mediated through visions or dreams, and the message is always plain and straightforward, that is, free of cryptic utterances.

them. In contrast with the Rephidim episode (Ex 17:1-13),⁴⁸ it is not simply a matter of the power of God's presence to provide sustenance or protection; now the issue is identity. Anticipating the scope of the (re)newed covenant of 34:10, Moses asserts that God's presence among the people is what sets them apart from all others (v.16). The exchange culminates in a mystifying appearance of God to Moses (Ex 33:17-23). God puts Moses in the cleft of a rock, where he is covered by God's hand. Once God's glory passes by him, Moses sees the back but not the face of God; a frontal visual experience of God would (once again) be fatal (v.20).⁴⁹ This anthropomorphic tradition mentioning the hand, back, and face of God is intertwined with a more abstract notion of God's presence manifest in a cloud and in "goodness" (v.19), a term denoting manifold positive attributes of Israel's god as well as the beneficence of God as partner in a covenant relationship (Fox 1973, 41-42).⁵⁰ The account of this theophany includes God's proclamation of the divine name which resonates with God's first appearance to Moses in 3:14. The grammatical formation of the initial revelation of the divine name ("I am who I am") recurs in the pronouncement of God's mercy and graciousness ("I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy").

The conclusion of the covenant renewal foregrounds Moses once more and provides the third account of God appearing to him. As for the first covenant (Ex 24:18), Moses is on the mountain for forty days and nights. He himself (Ex 34:27), and not God (as in 32:16 and 34:1), will inscribe the words of the covenant – called the 'ten words' (NRSV 'ten commandments') – on the tablets that he has prepared. The episode continues with the account of Moses' shining face. It begins with a narrative of what happens to Moses when he descends the mountain (Ex 34:29-33) and is followed by a statement of how that experience becomes part of ongoing ritual practice. Mosaic authority seems to be at stake. As the mediator *par excellence* between the divine and the human, as God's substitute and supplement, Moses takes on a unique aura, his face

⁴⁸ The Israelites under Moses have come from the wilderness of Sin. At *Rephidim* they can find no water to drink and angrily demand that Moses give them water. Moses, fearing they will stone him, calls on Yahweh for help and is told to command a "certain rock in Horeb" in God's name, which causes a stream to flow from it. Moses names the place *Massah* (testing) and *Meribah* (quarreling). Numbers has a similar event described as taking place near *Kadesh*. In this version, Yahweh tells Moses to speak to the rock. Moses strikes it twice with his staff and water pours out. In this narrative, Yahweh then reproaches Moses and Aaron for their lack of trust in God and tells them that for this they will not enter the Promised Land (Num 20:1-7).

⁴⁹ This event occurs *after* the 'face to face' encounter discussed earlier in Exodus 33:11.

⁵⁰ Also connected are the Thirteen Attributes of God's Mercy in Exodus 34: 6 which are repeated elsewhere (e.g., Num 14:18; Ps 103:7-14; Jer 32:18). While other texts quote the divine attributes found in Exodus, they are missing the section concerning intergenerational punishment (see Deut 7:9-10; Jon 4:2; Neh 9:17, 31).

so radiant the Israelites were afraid to approach him. Such radiance, in ancient Near Eastern imagery, is the characteristic luminosity of deities (Sarna 1991, 221, 262).⁵¹ Visible on human rulers, royal effulgence is part of the poetic expression of the king's divine authority. Transferred to Moses when God speaks to him directly, it reflects God's glory and signifies Moses' authority.⁵² Moses' own personality is subsumed into his role as mediator, with his social and religious authority originating from God and not in his own skills:

When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the LORD [Yhwh] to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him. (Ex 34:33-34)

His identity has been incorporated with God to the extent that, like God, Moses must cover his face, the locus of God's presence in him. In a previous encounter, "The LORD passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed: "The LORD! the LORD!" (Ex 34:6). This verse constitutes the divine response to Moses' two requests – that he "know" God's ways (Ex 33:13) and that he "Behold" his presence (Ex 33:18). God's mysterious passing (and hiding) before Moses – himself a supplement of God in the reiteration of the covering of a/the face – would suggest that the supplement also hides more than the 'original' when it hides itself. When Moses comes down from the mountain (with a shining face), is he a supplement hiding God?

Derrida's mechanisms for disrupting the key closures and certainty of presence – for instance, arche-writing, trace, *différance*, supplementarity – draw attention to the always already present slippages and ambiguities of presence (and identity). Destabilising, rendering undecidable – or, better, demonstrating an already present indeterminacy and supplementarity – such mechanisms can be shown to operate within all the formulations of presence and identity claimed by/within/imposed upon the Hebrew Bible. At this stage I have examined two such formulations: those concerning names and naming, those concerning practices of absence and appeal. What they suggest is that what has the name God is always inextricable from its systems of

⁵¹ Because the word for 'radiance' in other contexts can also mean 'horn', some translations of this text led to depictions (such as Michelangelo's famous statue) of a horned Moses in Christian art and to the anti-Semitic notion of horned satanic Jews.

⁵² See "Letter to the Ruler of Gezer" (ANET, 489-490).

supplementarity.⁵³ Indeed supplementarity makes possible all that constitutes the property of God: speech, wrath, covenant, particularity. But what is this property of God? On the one hand, it is that of which the possibility must be thought before God, and outside of him. God allows himself to be announced variously to Abraham, Noah and Moses (and to himself) after the fact of supplementarity, which is thus not an attribute – accidental or essential – of God. Supplementarity, which *is nothing (no-thing)*, neither a presence nor an absence, is neither a substance nor an essence of God. It is precisely the *play* of presence and absence, the opening of this play that no metaphysical or ontological concept can comprehend. Therefore this property of God is not a property of God: it is the very dislocation of the proper in general. It is the dislocation of the characteristic, the proper in general, the impossibility – and therefore the desire – of self-proximity and self-identity; the impossibility and, therefore, the desire of pure presence.

Hiding in Supplementarity

Often, the landscapes of biblical literature appear initially to be plain and simple. No shadows, no unfamiliar regions, no hidden depths. But the closer you look, the more complex they become. (Beal 1997, ix)

In tune with Timothy Beal's insight above, I now return once again to the dialogue between Moses and Yahweh in Exodus and Deuteronomy, two books that can be unfolded as exemplifying the impossibilities of locating and fixing the not-self or other (specifically Pharaoh and Egypt, as well as others) over against 'us' (biblical Israel). On my readings, they present an aggregation of the main identity convergences, shifting alignments, ambivalence, and marginal locations that lead, ultimately, to the profound disaggregation of other subjects and the order of relations of 'us' and 'them' upon which they rely. My focus in this chapter has thus been on how representations – the positioning of and relationality between contested sites such as 'God', 'Israel', 'Moses'

⁵³ This wrenches language – Rousseau's primary concern in Chapter Four of the *Essay* – from its condition of origin, from its conditional or its future of origin, from that which it must (ought to) have been and what it has never been; it could only have been born by suspending its relation to all origin (Rousseau and Herder 1986, 14-16). Its history is that of the supplement of (from) origin: of the originary substitute and the substitute of the origin. See Derrida's discussion of Rousseau's "articulation" (Derrida 1997a, 229-255). See also de Man (2014, 188-189).

and the other – are always already unstable and therefore problematic for a One and Only logic.⁵⁴ Or, as Derrida would write about the always already:

The very condition of a deconstruction may be at work in the work, *within* the system to be deconstructed. It may *already* be located there, already at work. Not at the center, but in an eccentric center, in a corner whose eccentricity assures the solid concentration of the system, participating in the construction of what it, at the same time, threatens to deconstruct. One might then be inclined to reach this conclusion: deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes afterwards, from the outside, one fine day. It is always already at work in the work. Since the destructive force of Deconstruction is always already contained within the very architecture of the work, all one would finally have to do to be able to deconstruct, given this always already, is to do memory work. Yet since I want neither to accept nor to reject a conclusion formulated in precisely these terms, let us leave this question suspended for the moment. (Derrida 1989a, 73)

Following Beal's insights, it is worth stopping here to reconsider in a different light Exodus 3:1-15 where the narrative becomes more complex – if not more problematic given the 'boundaries' of monotheism – with claims of presence, manifestation and visitation overwriting and supplanting what comes before them, as well as often hiding within the act of supplementarity itself. An angel of God appears *and* a voice emanates from the burning bush. Already an act of hiding occurs when the aspect of the divine messenger is overwritten by the divine voice of God emanating from the burning bush. One divine aspect – an angel of God – is overwritten by the divine voice hiding within the burning bush. Commentators in both the NRSV and The Stone Edition of the Hebrew Bible, for instance, variously 'write-off' the presence of the messenger in the biblical text in their commentary (itself a supplementary act) by indicating that "the angel ... will turn out to be the presence of the divine" before moving quickly to discuss the non-material properties assigned to fire as a form of divine appearance (NRSV *n3:1-6*, 86-87; *The Chumash* 1994, *n3:2-5*, 301).⁵⁵

Hiding, in other words, marks a practice for tracing, specifically because it draws attention explicitly to the way presence operates within key passages where

⁵⁴ Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I wonder whether Moses had an inkling of the unachievability of claims to presence when he asked for God's name.

⁵⁵ *The Chumash* (1994) contains commentaries by Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa (commonly known as Rabbeinu Behaye and R' Bachya) a fourteenth-century biblical exegete from Zaragoza, Spain, and Nahmanides (known by the acronym Ramban from Rabbie Moses ben Nahman Girondi) a twelfth-century Catalan Jewish scholar. Both R' Bachya and Ramban attempt to synchronise the fire, an angel and God in terms of a gradual exposure of the divine presence to Moses, who would otherwise be overwhelmed. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (NRSV) is supplemented by the work of an internationally recognised editorial team lead by Michael Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsome and Pheme Perkins.

God's presence is indicated. The example I will examine is from Deuteronomy 31:18 in which God declares "I will surely hide [*hastir*] my face [presence] from them".⁵⁶ The word 'to hide' (*cathar*) has a number of meanings that can be distilled down to: to hide oneself, to be hidden, be concealed, to conceal, hide and to hide oneself carefully. The sense one gets from these is that someone wishes to be hidden, possibly concealed from others, to keep (a) secret, and to be absent. Is it possible for such a word to suggest the assurance of veiled presence, as so many negative theological commentaries wish? Or does it rather indicate divine unavailability? In either case, does not this hiddenness or absence still supplement that which is present?

In Deuteronomy 31, which is set as a sermon from Moses on the verge of entering the Promised Land, there is an abandonment by God; and that abandonment is construed as punishment for the people's refusal to act (more literally, to walk) according to God's commands. More specifically, that punishment is imagined first and foremost as exile – loss of land, dislocation, signifying the literal and figural *ungrounding* of Israel and Jewish identity in dispersion. Moreover, insofar as there is a foundational relation between God, as divine speaking subject of election, of the Torah, or return, on the one hand, and the human subject in biblical literature on the other, what would be the significance of God hiding? Can the foundation and guarantor of identity for the biblical subject be hidden? If so, what does this suggest about the stability of identity? The issue of God's hiding, no matter how construed, does not work to solve the problem of theological ungroundedness. To the contrary, it contributes to the sense of dislocation, leaving a question standing as to what such a hidden God might mean for the practices of relationality typically assumed supported by biblical discourse. These are issues that will underpin the following chapter in which I finally turn to the challenges set by Foucault and Derrida, to trace a counterpoint genealogy and as such carry out the second stage of deconstruction, specifically to show how deconstruction and supplementarity both facilitate and ruin the models of presencing considered integral to the monotheistic onto-theological traditions and canons, and to then examine if there may be alternative modes for thinking monotheistic presencing. If this chapter has worked to draw out some of the impacts on (God's) presencing of the deconstructive logics of play, *différance*, and supplementarity, the next chapter draws these issues out further through a discussion of law, Law (Torah), God, and the question

⁵⁶ Other examples of hiding may be found in Gen 4:14, 31:49; Ex 3:6; Num 5:13; Deut 7:20, 29:29, 31:17, 32:20.

of justice. It is this discussion that will in turn inform my final explorations of justice and (as) a rethinking of monotheism in its supplementarity.

Chapter Eight

Supplementing Monotheism: Lawful or Just?

To Supplement Law

One of Derrida's most contentious claims has been that deconstruction *is* justice. As he makes clear in 'The Force of Law: "The Mythical Foundation of Authority"' (2002c), deconstruction is a discourse both on and of justice. It is "justice's own word, if it had a voice or a word" (Caputo 1997a, 130). As Derrida puts this, with due precautions, "I know nothing more just than what I today call deconstruction (nothing more just, I'm not saying nothing more legal or more legitimate)" (2002c, 249). Although my primary focus in this chapter traces the implications of this statement for monotheism, for a deconstructive soliciting and supplementing of monotheism, Derrida is making another important distinction here – albeit an unstable one (see 2002c, 250) – which needs consideration: that between law (and legality and legitimacy) and justice. This distinction, fundamental as it is for the practices and trajectories of both deconstruction and justice, is also significant when it is recalled that the monotheisms explored throughout this dissertation – specifically those of the Hebrew Bible – are so saturated by concepts of law that it is arguably impossible to understand their discourses, proclamations, and their understandings of God and of divine relations without understanding something of their legal concepts (Lind 1990, 61). For instance, "Torah" is a name for the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, and is the Hebrew term usually translated as "law"¹ (and is used 220 times in the Hebrew Bible). These books are also known as the books of the law because they are framed as containing the laws and instruction given by Yahweh through Moses to the people of Israel. And, indeed, by word count alone, accounts of biblical law comprise a substantial proportion of these books of the Bible, with a significant section of Exodus and much of Leviticus,

¹ Susan Handelman (1994) argues that this is a mistranslation. She contends that the word "Torah" comes from the Hebrew root *yud, reish, hey* [*yarah*] and as such rather means 'instruction' or 'teaching'. Although I note this distinction, I suggest that even this translation is informed by the problematic Derrida has come to call "law".

Numbers, and Deuteronomy all containing legal material. Such an orientation is further emphasised when it is remembered that these books contain no fewer than three law codes: that of Covenant (Ex 20:22-23; 33);² the Deuteronomic code (Deut 12-26; 28);³ and the Holiness code in Leviticus (Lev 17-26); along with smaller legal codes in the Decalogue (Ex 20:1-17; Deut 5:6-22),⁴ the Cultic Decalogue (Ex 34:10-26),⁵ and the Dodecalogue (Deut 27:11-26).⁶ Although some glosses of this focus on law have presented these various codes as legislation, seeing these materials as a collection of laws intended to guide daily living (for not only Israel but the books' readers), this is contested (e.g. Sailhamer 1991). My focus, however, is on the possible interventions of deconstruction as justice into biblical law, on just how deconstruction as justice might offer a supplementation of this law. As such, this chapter is comprised of three main sections. First I unpack Derrida's claims regarding deconstruction being justice, and his

² Known as the Covenant Collection or Book of the Covenant (see 24:7). This legislation begins and ends with commands regarding ritual (20:22-26; 23:10-19), so that worship surrounds social legislation.

³ Known as the legal corpus, detailing Deuteronomy's transformation of Israelite religion with a focus on the centralisation of worship (12); unconditional loyalty to God (13); the obligations of holiness (14); remission of debts, manumission of slaves and sacrifice (5); the festival calendar, laws of public officials, the organisation of justice and the prohibition against Canaanite cultic objects (16); local justice, justice at central sanctuary, and the law of the king (18); the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic prophet (18); cities of refuge and the integrity of the judicial system (19); rules for waging holy war (20); atonement for an unsolved murder, miscellaneous civil and family laws, legal obligations toward female captives, legal protection of the less-favoured wife, the rebellious son, treatment of the executed (21); various moral and religious responsibilities of citizenship, moral duties towards the neighbour, miscellaneous laws (such as the prohibition against cross-dressing 22:5), violations of marriage law, false accusations of breach of marital contract, adultery and rape (22); restrictions on access to Israel's assembly, special rules for military camp, the heightened moral responsibilities of the covenant community, prohibition of the return of escaped slaves, restrictions on prostitution, financial ethics, vows, gathering by the needy (23); laws promoting social harmony (24); concluding liturgies (26). Chapter 28 includes a series of blessings and curses based on dis/obedience: commencing with a blessing followed by three groups of curses and threats: the consequences of obedience (blessings) or disobedience (curse and threats), scenario of foreign invasion, undoing the Exodus (28). The third curse details the undoing of the Exodus (28:58-68) and starts with "if you do not diligently observe all the words of this law that are written in this book..." poses an interesting problem. How the commandments have become transformed/supplemented from oral proclamation to written text is unexplained, since it is not until 31:9, 24 that Moses commands that the Torah be put into writing. The consequences for breach of the supplemented, written Torah include a systematic reversal of the national history, covenantal promises, and theology included in that Torah. The punishment amounts to an anti-Torah that will dissolve the national identity (28:59-61). A further supplementation is identifiable when Moses reminds the people "These are the words [elsewhere, 'terms'] of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in the land of Moab, *in addition to* that he made with them at Horeb" (Deut 29:1, emphasis added). The phrase 'in addition to' presents the laws as a supplement to the Decalogue, in contrast to 4:44-45; 12:1 which mention neither the Decalogue nor the laws' supplementary status.

⁴ The popular English title 'The Ten Commandments' is derived from the traditional, although inaccurate English rendering of the Hebrew phrase *'aseret ha-devarim* that appears in Exodus 34:28 and in Deuteronomy 4:13 and 10:4. In fact, the term 'commandment' (Heb. *mitzvah*, pl. *mitsvot*) is not employed in the present context. The Hebrew means, rather, 'The Ten Words', which the Jews of ancient Alexandria in Egypt translated literally into Greek as *deka logoi*. This gave rise to the more accurate English alternative 'Decalogue'. In fact, traditional exegesis derived from thirteen, not ten, commandments from the Decalogue as, for instance the *Sefer ha-Hinnukh* (in the thirteenth century).

⁵ God renews the covenant by writing the commands again. The narrator here inserts a different (supplemental) version of the Ten Commandments (or Ten Words) (see v. 28) since the first version (20:2-17) has already been recorded.

⁶ The Dodecalogue details the ceremonial blessings and curses of the tribes of Israel at Shechem.

unstable distinctions between deconstruction, justice and law; second I bring his orientation regarding justice and law to the Hebrew Bible, demonstrating how the demands and subsequent trajectories of deconstruction as justice might supplement some of the claims of these texts; and finally I complete the second stage of the Derridean logic of deconstruction, in this case to show how monotheism – understood as law – is simultaneously made possible and ruined by its own supplementary calls for its deconstruction by justice. It is this last that also orients my concluding delineation and discussion of an ethical supplement to monotheism, of what I am calling a ‘return to exile’, drawing to a close my genealogical analyses and revisionings of the monotheistic traditions and promises.

Of Deconstruction as Justice

When Derrida has come to describe deconstruction as justice, his main contention has been analogical. Deconstruction is best understood as an awareness of an irrecusable undecidability – or play⁷ – which makes visible the instability and openness within all systems and methods which would otherwise present themselves as distinguishable and therefore delimited (see, e.g., Derrida 1978c). Indeed, Derridean deconstruction can best be explained as the quiet creeping over everything of a “film of undecidability ... so that we cannot quite make out the figures all around us” (Caputo 1993, 4). Or, to put this otherwise, deconstruction – itself constitutive of, as Derrida stresses, neither a distinguishable system nor even quite a method⁸ – is the opening of limits and boundaries to contestation and play, the dislodging of their desired centres and grounds,

⁷ Another way Derrida describes deconstruction is, of course, with reference to ‘play’. In “Structure, Sign and Play” he describes a “Nietzschean affirmation, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation” (Derrida 1978c, 292). Reading in a way that gestures towards that affirmation, that disperses ‘truth’ by exploiting the figurative power words have to generate an expanding universe of signification, is Derrida’s by now well-known deconstructive technique for undoing Western epistemological hubris. See my Chapter Seven for a more detailed consideration of ‘play’.

⁸ As Derrida states in an interview: “I have never had a ‘fundamental project.’ And ‘deconstructions,’ which I prefer to say in the plural, has doubtless never named a project, method, or system. Especially not a philosophical system” (1995b, 356). In this context, deconstruction is not concerned with the discovery of ‘truth’ or of distilling correct conclusions, but rather with the process of questioning itself. It is a process characterised by uncertainty and indeterminacy. For this reason, Derrida explains, deconstruction is not a ‘method’, and it cannot be transformed into one. One cannot ‘apply’ deconstruction to test a hypothesis or to support an argument. Rather it is an ongoing process of interrogation concerned with the structure of meaning itself (see, e.g., Derrida 1988a; 1988b). It also seems clear that Derrida did not expect the term deconstruction to have such impact: “When I chose this word [deconstruction], or when it imposed itself upon me – I think it was in *Of Grammatology* – I little thought it would be credited with such a central role” (1988a, 1). Derrida also makes this point elsewhere, saying that “It is a word I have never liked and one whose fortune has disagreeably surprised me” (1983, 44).

and the disruption of both their operations and desired effects. That is, “everything in deconstruction is turned toward opening, exposure, expansion, and complexification ... toward releasing unheard-of, undreamt-of possibilities” (Caputo 1997a, 31). Justice, too, however, needs to be understood with reference to this affirmation of the importance of undecidability and the unknown. More specifically, Derrida argues that all ethical and political decision-making – understood in terms of an ongoing responsibility rather than as being simply comprised by any calculable (and finite) obligation, duty or law⁹ – along with all attempts at grounding and presencing, are inextricable from what he calls the ordeal of undecidability (1992b, 24).¹⁰ In other words, he reminds us that such decisions can never be made – that is, calculated – simply in accordance with any given – lawful – system or programme. Rather, undecidability, as Niall Lucy put it, “opens every decision (and keeps it open) to the possibility of being otherwise” (2004, 151). It is this possibility that must be contended with and which makes undecidability an ordeal that simply cannot be glossed over. Informed by undecidability, both deconstruction and justice – or deconstruction *as* justice insofar as “the condition of possibility of deconstruction is a call for justice” (Derrida 1997b, 16) – must always remain open to what may come. After all, as Derrida stresses in another of his engagements with undecidability and justice:

no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those who are not yet *there*, presently living ... No justice ... seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present
(Derrida 1994, xix)

To put this yet another way, Derrida configures both deconstruction and justice in terms of the demand of the *à venir*, the to-come.¹¹ They both remain always in

⁹ Law, in Derrida’s words, is “a stabilizable, statutory and calculable apparatus [*dispositif*], a system of regulated and coded prescriptions” (2002c, 250).

¹⁰ Derrida stresses the undecidability inscribing each and every moment of decision-making: “The undecidable remains caught, lodged, as a ghost at least, but an essential ghost, in every decision, in every event of decision. Its ghostliness [*sa fantomaticité*] deconstructs from within all assurance of presence, all certainty or all alleged criteriology assuring us of the justice of a decision, in truth of the very event of a decision” (Derrida 2002c, 253; cf. 1999, 35).

¹¹ To say ‘come’ is not to call something or someone into your presence whose identity has been fully determined in advance. On the contrary, for Derrida, it is a call for the event itself with all of its unforeseen dimensions and possible complications. The etymological relation between ‘come’ and ‘event’ is more evident in French than in English: *viens* and *événement* belong to the same family as *venir*, the verb ‘to come’. To these words we can add others that Derrida involves in his discussion: *avenement* (advent), *avenir* (future), *aventure* (adventure), and *inventer* (to invent) (Derrida 1992b, 316–17). There is no such thing as an event that we can fully know in advance. Any event contains, as a

operation and always to come; their joint imperative can never be appeased or completed via reference to any present structure or system, by any “theoretical or thematic determination” (1995a, 26), or indeed by any “onto-anthropo-theological horizon” (2002b, 55). They are both, as such, a “promise to be kept” (1994, 89), and their to-come-ness, “although without presence, [is] the hic et nunc of urgency, of the injunction as absolute urgency” (2005a, 29).¹² This is also Derrida’s interconnection of both deconstruction and (as) justice not just with a recognition of undecidability, but more broadly with the tenets of impossibility.¹³ This is to further drive home the point that the demands of neither deconstruction nor justice can be finished with, in this case, prioritising only what appears ‘possible’ at any given moment. As he has thus put this:

[T]he most rigorous deconstructions have never claimed to be ... possible. And I would say that deconstruction loses nothing from admitting that it is impossible ... For a deconstructive operation *possibility* would rather be the danger, the danger of becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible approaches. The interest of deconstruction, of such force and desire as it may have, is a certain experience of the impossible. (Derrida 1992b, 327-28)

In addition to these points, Derrida also stresses that deconstruction and deconstruction as justice do not re-present any thinking or discourse that is somehow absolutely other or oppositional to that essential decidability which configures law and (as) what has been elsewhere called the onto-theological. After all, a thinking of undecidability does not itself “exist somewhere, pure, proper, self-identical” (Derrida 1988b, 141).¹⁴ Rather it marks the condition and consequence of the deconstructive soliciting of self-affirming

structural feature, the possibility that it can fall short of our expectations, exceed them, or surprise us in some way. In Derrida’s terms, no event has an uninterrupted horizon of expectation. So when we call ‘Come’ to an event, it is always possible for the unexpected to occur.

¹² As I have argued in the last two chapters, any positing, any naming of ‘what is’, is breached by what is not-yet, but promised in meaning: this will be. In this sense, the ‘present’ must be understood as unontologisable, because it can only be gathered into being retrospectively. It is only ever afterwards, when the event has already happened, that we may say ‘it is’. In order to be possible, the event must be ‘to-come’, but we can only know it once it has happened. Thus the promise is this: what is not and cannot be posited is coming, but its coming is not *not-yet*, but rather *already*. The future is already passed; it is no longer; it is the moment of *différance*.

¹³ Indeed Caputo delineates Derridean deconstruction as “a passion and a prayer for the impossible” (Caputo 1997b, xx). Also see Marko Zlomisljić’s (2007) *Jacques Derrida’s Aporetic Ethics*, in which he details the importance, for Derrida and for Derridean ethics, of “deciding there where the decision seems impossible” (Derrida 1995c, 83).

¹⁴ Appropriating a strategy of negative theology, Derrida is generally far more explicit in explicating what deconstruction is not as compared to what it is or might be. This is not to say, however, that deconstruction is a negative theology, a point that Caputo persuasively argues in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (e.g. Caputo 1997b, 1-3, 6-12), and Derrida himself stresses in ‘Différance’ (1982a). For interesting discussions of Derrida’s attitudes towards negative theology, see Harold Coward and Toby Foshay’s (1992) *Derrida and Negative Theology*; Graham Ward’s (1998) *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology*; Hugh Rayment-Pickard’s (2003) *Impossible God: Derrida’s Theology*; and Steven Shakespeare’s (2009) *Derrida and Theology*.

and self-regulating notions of presence and law. In Hurst's words, "[t]he very condition that makes a just decision possible (namely the preservation of law), is precisely the condition that simultaneously makes a genuinely just decision impossible (since justice requires the suspension of law)" (2004, 257). In other words, undecidability – and hence deconstruction – is simply the disclosure of the impossibility of any absolute or clear-cut lawful decidability and (as) justice. It is, as such, a disclosure of the impossibility of law being always just, and of the concurrent need for the deconstruction of law.¹⁵

Deconstruction thus marks the realisation that no effort made in the pursuit of justice that takes the form of acting on or reforming existing law with reference to identified needs or injustices can allow one to rest easy in the assumption that one has met one's responsibilities to justice. In this interval between the demands of both deconstructible law and undeconstructible justice, lies the traumatic realisation that any identifiably 'lawful' action will always fail to satisfy the "demand for infinite justice" (2002c, 248). "[I]ncalculable justice *commands* calculation", but any legal calculation made to redress a transgression compromises justice (257).

These are key points for Derrida, marking as they do the basis for his delineation of deconstruction being justice, and of the necessity of both. Law might be that "authorized force ... that justifies itself or is justified in applying itself" (Derrida 2002c, 233), but the question Derrida thus consistently asks is whether we in fact actually have a duty to only respond to others in terms of law? Or whether, in fact, our duty is one of *not* simply responding under the framework of law? This, of course, is never a call to abandon law altogether, and it is important to remember that Derrida does not conceive of justice as *outside* of law but rather as that which *exceeds* existing law (252). In fact, Derrida has argued on numerous occasions that we can never simply abandon law as such. To misquote him only slightly, Derrida reminds us that:

There is no sense in doing without the concepts of [law] in order to shake [law]. We have no language ... which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single deconstructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. (Derrida 1978c: 280-281)¹⁶

¹⁵ Derrida makes this point clearly at "The Villanova Roundtable": "[T]he law as such can be deconstructed and has to be deconstructed. That is the condition of historicity, revolution, morals, ethics and progress. But justice is not the law. Justice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve the law, that is, to deconstruct the law. Without a call for justice we would not have any interest in deconstructing the law" (Derrida 1997b, 16).

¹⁶ Derrida is of course talking here about metaphysics as opposed to law, but his point here is simply to stress our inability to make a clean break between the language of deconstruction and the language of that which "it seeks to contest" (1978c, 280-81).

This is Derrida's point again that we must not stop our lawful calculations – indeed there is an imperative to calculate ever more rigorously – but that we also need to recognise that there is always “a point or limit beyond which calculation must fail” (Derrida 1997b, 19), beyond which law can only fail. He further stresses the impossibility of ever being certain of even the legitimacy of law, arguing throughout “Force of Law”, for instance, that despite its protestations, law can essentially be “neither legal nor illegal” in its “founding moment” (2002c, 242). And yet, as Derrida also stresses here, “it is just that there be law” (244).

In effect, then, law – once recognised as always already informed by undecidability, as made less clear by deconstruction as justice, and yet as also necessary – always needs to be supplemented: in its founding moments, throughout its being put into practice, and where it fails. Where justice “exceeds law and calculation”, law has also to be conceived of as exceeding justice insofar as “one *must* [*il faut*] negotiate the relation between the calculable and the incalculable” (2002c, 257). Law needs to be supplemented by the demand for justice, by deconstruction as justice, which means it needs to be supplemented by what tends to be left out of or remains uncontainable by lawful exchanges. This is what Derrida has called the *tout autre*, that “entirely other that cannot be confused with the God or Man of ontotheology or with any of the figures of the configuration (the subject, consciousness, the unconscious, the self, man or woman, and so on)” (Derrida 1992b, 343). As Derrida points out elsewhere, “*Tout autre est tout autre*” (Derrida 1995c, 76, emphasis original). This ‘always other’, of course, is also what is *a-venir*, that which is to come, that which remains undecidable although still – always – marking a call for justice and to be supplemented with justice.

Supplementing Torah in the Name of Law

It is not controversial to name Torah as law (*halakhah*, or path). Torah, after all, is law as well as the beginning of law.¹⁷ Torah is, as discussed throughout this dissertation, foundational to the Hebraic (and God's) identity; it is the ‘law’ of such identity. It can

¹⁷ Genesis in Hebrew is *Bereishit*, which is Hebrew for “beginning”. This is also the first word of Genesis, usually translated, “In the beginning”, which is then followed with the account of the creation. While in the context of the first book, Genesis, the title connotes the beginning of the creation, Genesis (*Bereishit*, beginning) as the first book of the Law connotes a beginning of the Torah, or the beginning of the Law.

further be said that the law of Torah is to love law, with this love of law explained to be of more importance even than the love of God. This love, in fact, is itself law as expressed in the Midrash on Lamentations *Eichah Rabbah*: “So should it be that you would forsake me, but would keep my Torah” (Yer. Hag. 1:7; *Eichah Rab.*, intro. ch.2).¹⁸ This ‘law’ is also given voice by God when he brings the Israelites to the base of Mount Sinai and then, instead of giving them Torah, lifts the mountain over their heads “like a tub”, and says “If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there will be your burial” (b. Shabb. 88a-b).¹⁹ To so “love the Torah more than God”²⁰ – a phrase Levinas (1990) uses as the title for one of his essays – means, however, that while the law may be accepted as foundational, that very law also always stands in for an absence. In the case of Torah, this includes the absence – the hiding, as I have discussed in previous chapters – of God, with the Torah standing in for and supplementing God. In the case of the law, of the law as God, Derrida would stress the inadequacy of any purported point of origin and of any context as determinate for law, emphasising rather that law always requires constant negotiation, supplementation. This, of course, is not solely Derrida’s point about the founding moment of law being carried out before and without law (before and without God) – that, as noted earlier, law can be “neither legal nor illegal” in its “founding moment” (2002c, 242) – but also refers to a point

¹⁸ Composed in Talmudic Israel/Babylon (c. 500 CE), the *Eichah Rabbah* (or the Great Lamentations) is a haggadic and homiletic interpretation of the Book of Lamentations. Cf. Levinas’ narrator of the text “Loving the Torah more than God”, Yossel ben Yossel of Rakover, the last surviving member of his family is overwhelmed by what he has experienced and has come to the recognition that if any God exists, it is one who has withdrawn from the world and hidden his face. Yossel’s struggle with God’s absence in no way diminishes the centrality of the Torah. Echoing an expression in the Talmud, Yossel exclaims, “‘I love Him, but I love His Torah even more [...] and even if I were disappointed by Him and downtrodden, I would nonetheless observe the precepts of the Torah’” (Levinas 1990, 144).

¹⁹ This ‘law’ is further glossed by Levinas in his *Nine Talmudic Readings* (1994), as meaning that without law, all is meaningless, death, and oblivion – as symbolised by the threat of the overturned mountain. In his words: “If you do not accept the Torah, you will not leave this place of desolation and death, this desert which lays to waste all the splendors of the earth. You will not be able to begin history, ... [or] to exorcise fatality, the coherence of determined events. Only the Torah, a seemingly utopian knowledge, assures man [sic] of a place” (1994, 39). As an interesting aside, and example of the problematic of interpretation, when Kolitz’s short story – *Yosl Rakover Talks to God* (2000) – was translated from Yiddish into English and Hebrew, his name was not attributed to the work. Subsequent republications of *Yosl Rakover Talks to God* in Holocaust anthologies and in Jewish prayer books interpreted the story as an authentic testimony from the Warsaw Ghetto until, in the late 1990s, Rakover was able to reclaim his work and tell his own story (Rosen 1999).

²⁰ In *Difficult Freedom*, Levinas glosses this demand to love Torah even over God as suggesting the greatness of God. With reference to Jewish suffering in the Holocaust – and here Levinas is responding specifically to the text *Yosl Rakover Talks to God* (Kolitz 2000), whose title character narrates the final hours of his life at the end of the Warsaw Ghetto resistance – Levinas suggests that God’s hiding of his face in the midst of suffering, leaving only Torah as stand in, is in fact “to demand the superhuman of [the human], to create a [human] who can approach God and speak to Him without always being in His debt” (1990, 145). As he continues, this “is a truly divine mark of greatness!” (ibid.). More pragmatically, Levinas continues with the suggestion that to love the Torah more than God functions as a “protection against the madness of a direct contact with the Sacred that is unmediated by reason” (ibid., 144).

considered much earlier in this dissertation: that writing in general as well as law is always cut-off from any founding or grounding presence.²¹ As Derrida thus stresses:

For writing to be a writing, it must continue to “act” and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of a temporary absence, [or] because he is dead. (1988b, 8)

In addition, for any “‘written communication’ to retain its function as writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general” (ibid., 7). To love law more than God, then, is thus to supplement God as origin with the constitutively an-originary.

These are important points because all writing – including law – can be transplanted or used in new circumstances, and so brought to new ends, no context “permits saturation” (1988b, 18). At the same time, Derrida also stresses that determining meaning out of context is an impossibility,²² noting thereby that every iteration is in some ways both a singular event and a point of dehiscence. However, although writing always encompasses these features – including the possibility of its author’s absolute absence – this does not entail that the intentions of authors are irrelevant, or that the contexts of canonical interpretations are insignificant. The point is simply that the meaning of any writing – of any law – can never be exhausted by either: meaning is not controlled by the presence or absence of an author or origin, and writing – and reading – can function in any number of contexts.²³ Writing, Derrida goes on to say, is constitutively iterable, repeatable ad infinitum, as is law.²⁴

²¹ Of his own books Derrida comments, “In what you call my books, what is first of all put in question is the unity of the book and the unity of ‘book’ considered as a perfect totality, with all the implications of such a concept. ... At the moment when such a closure *demarcat* itself, dare one maintain that one is the author of books, be they one, two, or three? Under these titles it is solely a question of a unique and differentiated textual ‘operation’, if you will, whose unfinished movement assigns itself no absolute beginning, and which, although it is entirely consumed by the reading of other texts, in a certain fashion refers only to its own writing” (1981b, 3).

²² Derrida’s much cited aphorism that “*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]” (1997a, 158), is not a proposition of the imprisonment of experience in language, but is rather the point that all structures – whether “institutions, sexuality, the worldwide web, the body” (Caputo 1997a, 104) – bear traces of textuality. As Kevin Hart has glossed this statement, “the doctrine that there is nothing outside the text is neither esoteric nor difficult: it is merely that there is no knowledge, of which we can speak, which is unmediated” (Hart 2000, 26). Derrida later rephrased this point, saying instead that “there is nothing outside context”, and noting that while “this says exactly the same thing, the formula would doubtless have been less shocking” (1988b, 136).

²³ Derrida makes this point clearly: “A written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription. The breaking force [*force de rupture*] is not an accidental predicate but the very structure of the written text. ... But the sign remains readable even if the moment of its production is irrevocably lost and even if I do not know what its alleged author-scriptor consciously intended to say at the moment he wrote it, i.e. abandoned to its

Considered through this light of iterability, the law – Torah – is not only problematic in its beginning but it can never be finished (with) or contained. Uncontainable by any divine presence, standing in for that presence in at least some iterations, it itself always needs interpretation, commentary, supplementation, a point demonstrated by the intertwined relations – and presentations – of Torah with(in) and through its commentaries: the Mishna (also known as the Oral Torah) and the Talmud, to name the most recognised.²⁵ Cut off from and also not limited to any original setting – indeed, as I discuss below, the original setting of Torah is lost, destroyed – every writing, reading or interpretation is a new act that enables its survival although, as also thereby unable to police its own meanings, this also entails its re-contextualisation. All reading, in other words, is itself always both a reiteration – a writing – and a supplement of the ‘original’ text (if there is any such thing). This is doubly so for Torah, whose content, even throughout its ownmost traditions and contexts:

is imperilled, lost over and over. And so it must be remembered, recovered, rewritten, and rediscovered over and over, in a perpetual activity that defies the grand designs of fulfilment constructed by typology. (Schwartz 1990, 46; cf. 2005, 337)

In this way Torah exemplifies a supplementarity not only of God but also itself, with Schwartz reminding us that Moses dashes the tablets of the law he has received to pieces “before he has even had a chance to promulgate it” (2005, 337). The Torah “must be rewritten ... [and] ... whatever was written was not the last word” (ibid.). Indeed, there can be no last word, given that the word of God is already become – and can only be – a business of continual repetition, of re-reading and re-writing of law. As Schwartz stresses, “all we can have are copies” (ibid.).

The operation of this supplementarity is not, however, simply a matter of this writing (and re-writing) of the word – law – of God, of the law for God. Certainly

essential drift. ... One can perhaps come to recognize other possibilities in it by inscribing it or *grafting* it onto other chains” (1988b, 9).

²⁴ Derrida defines iterability as the “structure of repeatability” (1988b, 48). Holding together both the Latin *iter* (again) and the Sanskrit *itara* (other), the term names “the logic that ties repetition to alterity” (7). Iterability thus joins others of Derrida’s terms such as arche-writing, *différance*, supplementarity, even deconstruction itself, in drawing attention to the irrecusable undecidability informing – and rupturing – all structures and grounds, all laws.

²⁵ Talmud is the name given to the major corpus of Jewish exegesis, commentary, and law, and presents itself as the debate and dialogue of the teachers of Torah. More than this, however, it marks not only “a series of *declarative* assertions about the meanings of words ... but an attempt to effect a relation between that text overall and those for whom it is ‘scripture’” (Fraade 1991, 13). As Fraade explains this, because the word of God is always filled with multiple meanings, the task of Israel must be to continue Sinai, to re-enact the revelation by uncovering those meanings. So understood, the divine-human dialogue is itself re-enacted in the very structure of midrashic anthologies and Talmudic study.

writing, as Derrida (1997a) has pointed out, supplements for the presence considered inherent in and also lost with orality, as is clearly exemplified in Exodus by Moses, as prophet, bringing down to the Israelites the word of God and then replacing that spoken word with written tablets – the covenant – in a supplement for God’s granting of presence only to him (and to subsequent prophets, although only Moses speaks directly with God, mouth to mouth).²⁶ In turn, the tablets borne by Moses are firstly “written with the finger of Elohim” (Ex 31:18; Deut 9:10)²⁷ and then, when these are dashed to pieces by Moses, new tablets are prepared on which will be rewritten – in some iterations of the text it is ambiguous as to who completes this rewriting – “the propositions which were on the first tablets” (Ex 34:1-2).²⁸ The first physical tablets, then, themselves supplements for God’s word, are replaced almost immediately by copies, which themselves proliferate other copies: “Joshua built an altar to the Lord ... and there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written” (Josh 8:30-32). Such physical copies and covenants, however, are also further supplemented, with Yahweh proclaiming in Jeremiah the need to now write a new covenant, but this time one that will be inscribed directly into the minds and hearts of the Israelites (Jer 31:31).²⁹ Only so, God continues, through this attempt to remove the mediation of supplement, “will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (ibid.). The questions, of course, concern whether they will know the law, and how much of a presence is that which appears always already traversed, overwritten by and through absence?

As prophet, Moses is also himself a supplement for God and God’s presence, speaking and writing down God’s word for God with divine sanction. In such instances, Moses is presented as the messenger and instrument of God and of God’s law insofar as God’s presence underwrites Moses’ authority as messenger, an authority on display via his face shining from his contact with God.³⁰ In God’s words, Moses is to “go, and I

²⁶ Moses exclusively knows Yahweh “face to face,” that is, “as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex 33:11).

²⁷ Yahweh orders Moses to come near, saying, “I will give you the tablets of stone, the doctrine and the commandments which I have written that you may teach them” (Ex 24:12).

²⁸ For a detailed examination of some of the processes of writing and re-writing in Exodus, see Arthur J. Jacobson’s (1992) “The Idolatry of Rules: Writing Law According to Moses, with Reference to Other Jurisprudences”. Also see Brian Britt’s (2004) *Rewriting Moses: The Narrative Eclipse of the Text* and, for similar discussions of Jeremiah, see A. R. Pete Diamond and Louis Stulman’s (2011) edited collection *Jeremiah (Dis)Placed: New Directions in Reading / Writing Jeremiah*.

²⁹ Compare Yahweh’s condition given in Exodus that for Yahweh to remain “inside” the people after the crisis of the golden calf, he will not show himself to the people face to face as he has done with Moses. The people will only be able to talk with him by talking to themselves, they will collaborate with Yahweh by collaborating with themselves, with each other.

³⁰ “Moses came down from Mt Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been speaking with YHWH. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was shining, and they were afraid of

will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak” (Ex 4:12; cf. Jer 1:9). In this role he mediates between God and the people: when God spoke the rules Moses wrote, “all the people see” are “loud noises and torches, and the voice of the horn, and the mountain smoking. And when the people feared ... they said to Moses: You speak with us, and we will hear. For if Elohim will speak with us, we will die” (Ex 20:19). Moses’ presence and directed action and speech is, however, itself supplemented further, seemingly in response to Moses suffering from a speech impediment (Rashi uses both the French word *balbutier* and the Yiddish *shtammeler*, both meaning to stammer) – “O my Lord, I am not eloquent ... I am slow of speech and slow of tongue” (Ex 4:10). Indeed he calls himself a man “of uncircumcised lips” (Ex 6:12, 30).³¹ His supplement, then, is both God and Aaron, his brother. Firstly, God will be Moses’ mouth, teaching him what he should speak, at the same time as Moses stands in as God’s mouth with his authority underwritten by God’s presence and on display through his shining (and veiled) face. Indeed, as a reminder or extension of Yahweh’s presence on Sinai, Moses’ shining face itself arguably supplements both God and Moses. Secondly, it is Aaron who is directed by both God and Moses to act and speak on Moses’ behalf: “You [Moses] shall speak to him [Aaron] and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as a God for him” (Ex 4:15-16; cf. 7:1-2). Thirdly, Moses is also supplemented by himself being written – he becomes a speaking character in a story written by himself – with there being a dialectical relationship between Moses and the written tradition, Torah. Indeed, neither can be understood without the other insofar as

him” (Ex 34:29-30). For a thorough discussion of the possible meanings of this shining of Moses’ face, see Joshua Philpot’s (2013) “Exodus 34:29-35 and Moses’ Shining Face”.

³¹ In his discussion of Moses’ impediment – his “heavy of mouth and heavy of speech” (see Ex 4:10) – Britt (2004, 117-130) concludes that Moses’ speech impediment is best understood as a means of calling attention to Moses as a writing figure who gradually replaces a speaking one, just as writing overtakes the original spoken word and succeeds it as Torah. Not only is the spoken Decalogue transformed into written tablets, but, as this is inscribed in ever-larger circles of interpretation, Torah moves from spoken to written prophecy, and from an oral canon to a written one. Buber too stresses the intermediary status of Moses: “Sent as bearer of the word, intermediary between heaven and earth through the word, Moses possesses no mastery over freely coursing speech. He has been created thus and has been chosen thus. By this a barrier is raised between him and the human world. He who has to establish a covenant between the people and YHWH is, so to speak, not accepted fully into the covenant of his tribe” (1989, 59). This ill-fit with the covenant of his human tribe is further exacerbated by his role as God’s supplement as exemplified by his subsequent practices of veiling and unveiling due to the Israelites being unable to gaze upon his face due to its glory from speaking directly – mouth to mouth – with God (see, e.g., Beal and Linafelt 2005, 182-83; cf. Philpot 2013).

the “openness and closure of Torah represent the inscription of Moses as a writing and written figure” (Britt 2004, 174).³²

In addition to these operations, Arthur J. Jacobson has argued that Moses supplements the commands given to him: “Moses’ own text gives evidence that Moses was prepared to interpret the words Yahweh spoke to him”, “Moses’ writing is itself a ‘reading’ of the spoken propositions. It is a rewriting of them as rules” (1992, 124, 104), as law. For example, in executing Yahweh’s command to get the people ready for Yahweh to come to them, Jacobson points out that Moses adds a further preparation to those listed, to “not come near a woman” (Ex 19:15), a preparation that he could seemingly only have inferred by interpreting Yahweh’s propositions (and making, it has been suggested, specific reference to the decrees surrounding the sacrifice of a red heifer given in Numbers 19:2-10). In addition, Moses arguably shows interpretive license in carrying out Yahweh’s instructions with regards to the making of altars and sacrifices, adding to these instructions the reading to the people of Moses’ own written copy of Yahweh’s propositions, and also retaining blood from sacrifices to sprinkle on the people in a covenant ceremony of his own devising (see Jacobson 1992, 117-30). And, arguably, such license is also shown when Moses chooses to break the first tablets – to break God’s word in effect – with Jacobson suggesting that the crisis of the golden calf causes Moses to regard these tablets – “written with the finger of Elohim” – as a sort of engraving and hence to see that such rules could only be themselves treated as a kind of idol and obeyed, at best, out of fear of punitive sanctions. The point Jacobson makes is that here Moses has to come to supplement God’s word – law – with his law. God’s propositions – which could not be heard when spoken by God, or heard in an idolatrous form, or heard only by God’s mouth in Moses – need, in effect, to be brought into human consciousness. They need to be written down and read aloud by Moses. More than that, however, they need to be negotiated into rules which ordinary people can use as premises for action. Where God’s own speaking of the law is a cause only of fear, and where his writing – “the writing of Elohim, graven on the [first] tablets” – could be treated as an idol, Moses’ own supplementing of the law arguably:

poses rules as instruments to assist humans to realize Elohim’s propositions. It also puts rules in play, opens them to change through consciousness, through ceaseless collaboration of the people with Yahweh. Law requires both movements: posing rules and putting them in play. To deny one or the other is

³² Moses can be described, in the words of Derrida, as both a “writing being” and as “being written” (1997a, 18).

not to know Moses' law. It is not to know the law altogether. (Jacobson 1992, 111)

Importantly, then, Moses' law and presence supplements God's propositions, but, as Jacobson also points out, this is a dangerous supplement. Certainly, as Jacobson has argued, without this supplementation, God's propositions might at best be treated as idols, but this supplementation also means that the rules always remain open to further amendment and re-writing.

What Moses achieves, then, is the supplementing of both God by law and of law by law; of the supplementing of God's law – and Jacobson (1992) would add that God's law itself is already an issue of supplementation, of Yahweh supplementing Elohim's law – with Moses' written law.³³ This is suggested to be a necessary supplementation, even as it opens the law to re-reading and re-writing and interpretation, to argument and negotiation as when Moses challenges God's decrees – such as God's first plan to annihilate the Israelites after the golden calf episode – and when Moses' delayed and then negotiated writing of the law, a process which took forty days and forty nights and resulted in a law which “Moses does not explicitly say he wrote with clear authority” (Jacobson 1992, 106). Thus, after Moses – and the Torah is always ‘after’ Moses – remains the question as to what of the law, of Torah, is *really there*, *really* original, *really* authorised. Again, how much of a presence is that which is traversed by absence? This, of course, is Derrida's broader debate with regards to the supplement, when he observes that the notion “harbours within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary” (1997a, 144):

The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, *technè*, image, representation, convention, etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function. ... But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not

³³ Jacobson argues that this supplementarity is necessary, that (this) law “requires not one, but three writings. The first is Elohim's writing—the world, along with the laws of the world, as a finished, created product. The second is Yahweh's collaborative writing—human deeds continuing creation. The third is Moses' writing, which records the struggle over the first two” (1992, 106). He suggests, further, that Moses so “teaches Yahweh and the people to tolerate delay—the people's delay, Moses' delay and the delayed authority of rules” (110). Following a related trajectory, Britt (2004) also talks explicitly of Moses' Torah.

simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. (ibid., 144-45)

Both significations are open in Moses' Torah. It is a surplus ("a plenitude enriching another plenitude"); but awarded its status as supplement on the basis of its ability to make up for a lack, to alert us to aspects of the law otherwise unwritten and/or overlooked; it is compensatory, adding to replace. That the original law – God's law? Elohim's and Yahweh's? – requires such intervention at all, however, suggests that the *really there*, it seems, is in need of Moses' (and others') reading to be stabilised, indeed, to be made known at all, which not only implies that there is already a lack in the original law, but that the sense in which this text may be called original is less certain. The need for Moses' Torah thus demonstrates that the original law, supposedly the locus of natural and present sense and of Moses' rewritings, is unable to secure its own meaning, and is in need of Moses' (re)writing to do so. At this point it becomes clear that the *really there* really belongs to Moses' Torah (where it is determined) rather than God's original (where, clearly, it is not). Thus, while Moses' Torah is unthinkable without the original law, the *really there* (supposedly the essence of original law), is unimaginable without Moses' rewritings. In this sense, the *really there* belongs to "an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence" (Derrida 1997a, 157).

The supplement thus produces what it supplements, and exposes immediacy (here, the immediate – the plain, the natural – and present meaning) as something that is derived (Derrida 1973, 89). Following this logic, interpretation is both an external account of the sense of a text, and an external condition that makes meaning possible. It is always exterior, yet at the same time does not represent something entirely different, just as Moses' Torah is not completely distinguishable from God's law. Thus, as Derrida describes it, the supplement occupies the paradoxical position of being "neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essence" (1981b, 43). It is never the thing in itself, it is always the extra instead of the essence. Its own "strange essence", Derrida notes, is "not to have essentiality: it may always not have taken place. Moreover, literally, it has never taken place: it is never present, here and now" (1997a, 314). Re-presentation – Moses' rewritings and interpretations – cannot then be an accident of presence, an overspill of fullness, rather it arises from – is "born from", writes Derrida – an abyss (ibid., 163).

The “two determinate possibilities” in the notion of the supplement – complement and completion, “accretion and substitution” (Reynolds 2004, 47) – make it a *double bind*, an *undecidable*, terms indicating that a logical impasse has been reached. Thus it can be argued – and, indeed, it has been, and with reason – that Derrida recommends hesitation. A function of such undecidables as the supplement (surplus or completion?), the *pharmakon* (cure or poison?), the ghost (absence or presence?) is their resistance to binary thinking: “We will not choose”, Derrida once wrote, “between the opening and totality” (1978c, 84). But while such writing on deferred meanings and aporia might seem set to promote little more than vacillation and stasis, undecidability is not, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter, the antonym of “decisiveness”, to use Caputo’s words, but of “programmability, calculability, computerizability, or formalizability” (1997a, 137). Thus it is undecidability that constitutes the condition and possibility of decision, which Derrida (drawing on Kierkegaard) presents as a leap of faith which outdistances all planning, for if a decision were simply the result of weighing up pros and cons, it would be a programmable product and not a decision at all. That is, even if a course of action were chosen after considerable calculation, the moment of decision itself cannot be an inevitable result of this process. It must still be chosen, and so requires a movement into uncertainty that “evokes that which is outside of the subject’s control” (Reynolds 2004, 48); it is in this sense a form of madness (see, e.g., Derrida 1995a, 65). In so doing, as I have stressed earlier, Derrida does not play down the urgency of decision-making, but emphasises the experience of undecidability through which any decision must pass (1988b, 116), and this experience is, as discussed earlier, always open to – and indeed the opening to – the demand of and for justice. What, then, is this demand in the context of Torah?

Supplementing Torah in the Name of Justice

If justice requires the moment of madness that gives itself up to the impossible decision, insofar as its undecidability is always coupled with the necessary duty to make a decision while still taking the law into account, it can mark no ideal, goal or telos – a paradigm or model or outcome that the law works towards – since this would be no more than law writ large. And yet justice *is* that which the law means to bring about, it is law’s “‘drive,’ its ec-centric ec-stasy”, as Caputo (1997a, 131) puts this. Justice, then, is the name in which the law is revised and rewritten, and, to reiterate, justice is not

deconstructible (only *things* are deconstructible, as Caputo also stresses here), it *is* deconstruction. That is, justice (the just decision) opens the present and possible to the unforeseeable and impossible, to the other other. If, then, Moses supplemented the law with law, opening it, Torah, to the human, rewriting it for the human – or, more specifically, for the Israelites. Perhaps the demand for justice is a call to open the Torah further again.

In the sense of justice driving law's rewriting, then, such a move might first be traceable in the various rewritings of Torah to better encompass some of law's other others. One such would be the initiative driving the publication of *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (2007). Addressing the Biennial Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) Conference in 2007, Rosanne Selfon, President of the Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ), recounts the fourteen-year lead-up to this publication:

In 1993 at the WRJ assembly in San Francisco, Cantor Sarah Sager took a giant step challenging the entire delegate body to create a feminist commentary. "Imagine", she said, and I quote, "women permitted for the first time, feeling able, feeling legitimate in their study of Torah, and imagine sisterhood is the empowering agent for this transformation of what *is* into what *should* be ... the concept of a classical women's commentary which give rightful prominence to the female's in our people's history" ... WRJ clearly understood that this commentary would require getting together the finest women scholars in the fields of Bible, rabbinic and contemporary Jewish thought. Challenging centuries of male-dominated commentary would require – carefully, I say this – *respectful* study to reveal the missing pieces of our existing tradition while acknowledging *all* those years of commentary. And simply put, publishing this commentary would require extraordinary collaboration between diverse professionals and a federated organisation of volunteers living throughout North America. Indeed, such an undertaking has *never* been experienced by any of the committed partners. Scholars, clergy, teachers, the URJ Press and URJ and Women of Reform Judaism, Board of Directors voted to accept all, and I mean all, financial obligations ... More than 100 female poets works are included from Jewish women worldwide representing a continuum of personal observance, were involved in the creating of this commentary. Of its many, many – and we are proud, we have many accomplishments over the past ninety-four years – *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* marks perhaps the greatest achievement of Women of Reform Judaism. Just two weeks ago, in this very same convention center, an international bible conference was staged. Jewish feminist scholar Judith Glasgow commented ... "This is the most exciting thing to happen since the ordination of women." This morning I stand before you representing thousands and thousands of members of Women of Reform Judaism who share great joy and pride in having advanced this publication from

its inception through its infancy and youth, until this very moment when it has reached magnificent maturity, its publication debut. (Selfon 1997)³⁴

In a very real sense, such an initiative is driven by justice, by the need to supplement the Torah with justice, insofar as, for thousands of years, interpreting Torah and tradition has almost exclusively been the province of men, and has followed a trajectory of excluding and hiding women's (and others') voices and experiences.³⁵ Perhaps following Moses' own trajectory of demanding human collaboration with God, a need has been recognised for laws and commentaries that speak to all people and that can further enrich and broaden experience. The scale of producing such a commentary from and for the voice of women is clear in Selfon's address, from her recounting of Sager's challenge in 1993 through to the publication's reception by Glasgow in 2007. To capture as many different voices within this commentary on key aspects of the Torah portion (or *parashah*), each is divided into quintet form, with five voices following a cycle of explicating the text (the fifth aspect – voices – contains many more as it represents the multiple experiences of Jewish women from across the world that Selfon spoke about above). The Torah passages are framed firstly by a central commentary written by a biblical scholar; by a second, shorter commentary by another biblical scholar that complements, supplements, or challenges the primary interpretation; followed by a compendium of post-biblical interpretations highlighting issues relating to women; then by a contemporary commentary exploring the social, philosophical, and theological concerns that link the Torah portion to current issues; and finally by creative responses in the form of poems, prose or modern midrash.³⁶ The idea, in other words, with this Torah commentary is to expand and supplement the conventional – lawful – lenses through which Torah is read.³⁷ Additional study guides for each Torah portion can also be found in the sidebar and are freely available online.

³⁴ The decision to ordain women as rabbis sends an important message to (previously closed) communities about inclusivity and variance. For women it means it is possible to reconcile one's identities as, for example, Jewish and modern women.

³⁵ For some addresses of such issues of exclusion, see, for instance, *Gender, Power & Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Fewell and Gunn 1993), *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation and Esther* (Beal 1997), *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and The Book* (Beal and Gunn 1997), *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Tribble 1984), *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation* (Schroer and Bietenhard, eds. 2003), *Sanctified Agression: Legacies of Biblical and Post-Biblical Vocabularies of Violence* (Bekkenkamp and Sherwood 2003), *The Prostitute and the Prophet* (Sherwood 1994), *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field* (Sherwood and Fisk 2017), and *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* (Fuchs 2003).

³⁶ 'Midrash' comes from the Hebrew root *lidrosh*, which can be translated as 'examine' or 'interpret' – and this is a process of justice in filling in the biblical gaps.

³⁷ This publication was administered under the social justice division of the WRJ that works on key aspects of social reform such as refugee economic empowerment, civil rights, environmental reform,

In one sense, this initiative and publication is clearly justice-driven. It marks the demand that the now sizable collection of rabbis, biblical scholars, poets, and academics who are Jewish women – insofar as women have been othered and in many ways hidden and/or silenced in Moses’ Torah – should have their world and experience written into new rewritings of the Torah and law. And yet, as this demand is realised, along with other such demands,³⁸ it becomes a matter of law. Indeed, it becomes explicitly rabbinic – midrashic – in its ongoing presentation of diverse views and different sources of authority side by side, and its refusal to compile the different stories of the Israelites, their prophets and God(s) – and of what is hidden and then revealed – into a single biography (Neusner 1988), while still in effect modulating this diversity into a “harmonious collective experience involving mutual recognition and common participation in an enterprise that spans generations” (Miller 1996, 196).³⁹ The contours of the already existing system may be altered, re-calibrated to embrace new voices and new words, but this will inevitably, unavoidably, destroy those voices and words as other (Ruiz 2015). If justice (the just decision) opens the present and possible to the unforeseeable and impossible, then the Women’s Torah marks rather an expansion of the horizon of expectation of law, expanding what is present and possible and adding to the voices already in play. Perhaps, then, to supplement Torah with justice is itself always the aim of supplementing law with (more) law, to accept the imperative (of justice) to keep on rewriting law to be more lawful. And yet, if Derrida’s call for deconstruction, for justice, for deconstruction as justice, does not belong to such a

women’s rights and global affairs, writing clear responses to key social justice issues and publishing them widely, sometimes with great creativity. See for instance the “Equal Pay Living Talmud” (Women of Reform Judaism, 2017) produced to inspire talk about pay equity in communities. Advocacy guides have been published since 1921 (with “Disarmament”) and span topics as diverse as “Atomic Energy” (1945), “Technical Assistance and Economic Aid” (1955), “Equal Rights Amendment” (1973), “Boat People” (1977), “The Rights of Gay Men and Lesbian Women” (1991), “Debt Relief” (2000), “Divestment Policy to End Genocide in Dafur” (2007), and “The Crisis of Syrian and Other Refugees from the Middle East” (2015). All WRJ resolutions and statements are available for download at their social justice pages: <https://wrj.org/wrj-views>.

³⁸ For commentaries on Torah passed through a LGBTIQ⁺ lens, see Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser, David Shneer’s (2009) edited collection *Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*. Also see, for example, David Tabb Stewart’s (2017) “LGBT/Queer Hermeneutics and the Hebrew Bible”.

³⁹ Such modulation of diversity opens into a broader issue regarding biblical commentary. For example, Terence Fretheim’s article, “Old Testament Commentaries: Their Selection and Use” (1982), raises some tantalisingly provocative questions about such tendencies, but answers them to forestall explosive conclusions. For example, while Fretheim confronts “the dogmatic/philosophic overpowering of the text that has been (and still is) characteristic of religious and scholarly communities”, he ultimately takes solace in the idea that this danger is alleviated by “the publicly recognised canons of accountability with respect to theological statements” (1982, 367). He furthermore confesses that “commentary writing is a distiller’s art” (ibid., 369), but does not go on to suspect his own statement and ask why or what he ‘distils’ or what impurities he is trying to filter out. Fretheim clearly regards consensus as a safe-haven, a guarantee against error. A panel was devoted to “Commentary: An Appraisal” at the 1982 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and in the same year an edition of *Interpretation*, edited by B. W. Anderson (Anderson 1982), was devoted to a discussion of “The Problem and Promise of Commentary”.

future-present of this more lawful law, but to an absolute future, a future always to-come, then it must also make explicit a welcome extended to the un-represented, indeed un-representable other – the *tout autre*. And this presents deconstruction and (as) justice (and as the supplementing of law) as:

deeply and profoundly “affirmative.” *Oui, oui*. To be sure, deconstruction does not affirm what it *is*, does not fall down adoringly before what is present, for the present is precisely what demands endless analysis, criticism, and deconstruction. ... On the contrary, deconstruction affirms what is to come *à venir*, which is what its deconstruction of the present, and of the values of presence, is all about. So radical is this deconstructive impulse that the *à venir* itself is not to be construed in terms of presence. ... Deconstructive analysis deprives the present of its prestige and exposes it to something *tout autre*, “wholly other,” beyond what is foreseeable from the present, beyond the horizons of the “same”. (Caputo 1997a, 41-42)

Deconstruction as justice thus must reopen laws, texts and traditions – the Torah, monotheism, the logic of the One and Only (whether positively or negatively inflected) – with a welcome that opens the same to the other, even as the other, once recognised, becomes lawful and as such part of the same’s recognisable diversity. It must supplement laws, texts and traditions with this opening and welcome to the other, with the other (and other others), even as it is also a recognition that the other cannot always be foreseen, and that this opening and the other – as with others of the concepts and moves of deconstruction as justice – cannot be confined to “the basis of the present, or of the presence of the present” (Derrida 1982a, 21).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Derrida has also glossed this opening in the terms of hospitality which he describes, for instance, as amounting “to giving oneself over in going toward the other, to coming toward the other but without crossing the threshold, and to respecting, to loving even the invisibility that keeps the other inaccessible” (1995c, 74). For this hospitality, the other must remain that which (whatever, whoever), “in arriving, does not [have to] cross a threshold separating two identifiable places, the proper and the foreign, the proper of the one and the proper of the other” (1993, 33, 34). He also speaks of hospitality as irresponsibility and heresy in *The Gift of Death* (1995a, 61, 26), as risk in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (1999, 111), and as aporia and antinomy in *Of Hospitality* (2000, 77). Compare these glosses with the prescriptions known as the Noahide Laws which stress the importance of providing hospitality and succor to strangers. As can be read in Leviticus: “When the stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the LORD am your God” (Lev 19:33-34 JPS). The commentary accompanying The Stone Edition of *The Chumash* – using ‘proselyte’ in contrast to the JPS ‘stranger’ and the NRSV ‘alien’ – instructs that it “is forbidden to taunt a proselyte by reminding him of his non-Jewish past and suggesting that this makes him unfit to study God’s Torah” (Rashi; Sifra). As the next verse states: “Who, more than a Jew, should understand the hurt felt by an unwanted stranger?” (Sifra, Kedoshim, Chapter 8 on Vayikra 19:33-34).

Welcoming in the Name of Justice

If deconstruction in the name of justice – deconstruction as justice – is always constitutively the tracing and negotiating of openness as a welcome to other others, the question I must return to now is what this can mean in the contexts of the genealogical discussions and the inter-related eventalisations of the interlinked theologies, theopolitics, histories, literatures, traditions, practices and logics of monotheism that have formed the bulk of this dissertation. These discussions have certainly been vital in order to expose a range of the points of palimpsest, rupture, aporia and supplementarity inextricable from and, indeed, foundational to onto-theological and teleological thinking, with these points further showing how calls for prescriptive behaviour and claims to legitimacy or identity might be eluded or overcome or reconstituted into a welcome to an other. Indeed, it is through attempts to enter these aporias in a new way – aporias which are always already caught up with creating, maintaining and affirming how we got here, with the now-ness of this moment – that it may be possible to open up the conditions for different trajectories of thinking and (ethical) engagement. But this is to move too quickly, and more work is needed first in the retracing of these various aporias and their openings and their diverse impacts from the preceding chapters. This calls for a brief return to my preceding discussions before I turn finally to trace – welcome – some of these different trajectories.

In my Introduction, then, I set out three main points that, intertwined, have informed my subsequent exposure of those points of aporia and rupture inextricable from and, indeed, foundational to the One and Only logic of onto-theo-logical and teleological thinking. The first was that biblical texts are inescapably products of collective imagination. The second is that biblical texts are deployed to accord status, priority, and privilege insofar as they are invested with ‘power’ and ‘meaning’ under the umbrella of monotheism, and that the device of monotheism is itself a mechanism to unify, make whole, close and ratify biblical texts, and anything seeking legitimation and authority under this banner. The last is that plurality and complex irruptions of plurality and dissent nonetheless mark both monotheism (a particular logic) and its dissemination (legitimation of biblical canons).

As also discussed there, my approach in this dissertation has drawn on Foucault’s ideas of genealogy to both make visible and map some of the key problematics identified above in points one, two and three. Drawing on Foucauldian ideas of genealogy and eventalisation in particular has allowed me to bring to the fore

the contingency of what has been taken for granted, to denaturalise what seems immutable, and to destabilise a range of the specific constructs of identity that have functioned both inclusively and exclusively. Acutely aware that the confines of a dissertation could build only a partial and perspectival map of monotheistic eventalisation, and that other maps would be possible, I acknowledged that my genealogical analysis would necessarily be a messy map-making of only some of the cross-cutting and interlinking discursive practices, systematic structures and canonised events informing and upholding monotheism – practices that differentially engage with each other as well as with a manifold of (canonised) events, artefacts, and themes. In addition, I noted the importance of also utilising Derrida’s conceptions of deconstruction, supplementarity and trace to better realise my own argument. Whilst my utilisation of Foucault’s ideas has allowed me to examine the conditions that enabled the emergence and legitimation of certain (versions of) discursive practices over others, Derrida’s conceptual apparatus around deconstruction and supplementarity cautioned me against strategies of inversion or subversion as leaving hierarchical structures untouched. Both have allowed me to stress the palimpsestuous nature of this genealogy, its constitutive interlayering, its being both interrupted and (re)traced by other intersecting texts, traditions, practices and events that resonate through a “repetition without replication” (Hutcheon 2006, 21).

Chapter One began with the premise that examinations of the origin and development of biblical canons essentially comprise the seeking of stability and the ratifying of boundaries for identity and community. In order to demonstrate this I traced the event of textual canonisation as an example of a singularity used to undergird monotheistic beliefs and practices used to shore up particularity, often at the expense of other possibilities. I drew here on Foucault’s concept of singularity in particular, meaning those points or events which can facilitate the disruption and collapse of a seemingly coherent (canonised) discourse and undermine claims to a closed, privileged text or tradition. In particular, with reference to scribal traditions, canonical processes, and biblical texts, I drew out singularities such as the rediscovery of the lost Book of the Law (2 Kgs 22-23), not as a narrative device to legitimate Josianic reform but rather as marking an aporia. Where 2 Kings 22 sought to legitimate Josiah’s reform by appeal to a previous tradition, I argued this instantiation actually foregrounded the problematic of the authority considered inherent in canonisation. Attempts to seal (and close off) biblical canons were also traced in order to further demonstrate fractures within structures and to argue for the imperative of uncovering canons. I further introduced the

idea of biblical commentary not as a reinforcing mechanism for monotheism, but as an aporia capable of demonstrating the potential to open ‘closed’ texts. Foucault’s genealogical perspective is a reminder that there are always other operations possible within – and as – canonical texts that work to undermine exclusionary operations.

Chapter Two also engaged Foucauldian perspectives to map the Bible as history tradition as an eventual problem for ideas of an original text and original Israel. My delineation of specific events in Bible as history methodologies – engaging literary, historical, and archaeological materials – traced the quest to affirm and legitimate biblical history through the development of methodologies, theories and categories of study focussed on drawing on rational modes – of progression, of scientific method, of scholarly pursuit – to establish the provenance of biblical texts and their narratives. In tracing and instantiating the proliferation of discursive practices created to sift and present evidence, higher criticism and biblical archaeology themselves presented as key discursive events for monotheistic discourses in the push for a rigorous modern tradition of historical interpretation. Moving, however, from the eventual problem of researching the Bible as history, through to an examination of the framing and uptake of biblical archaeology as a discipline, and its subsequent influence on biblical scholarship, made clear that such key discursive events – events formative to the discipline and study of theology – were also and perhaps always already indicators of plurality at work, wherein once-thought stable and coherent structures and claims to provenance give way again and again to competing and disruptive discursive practices.

In Chapter Three I identified covenantal obligation – an ongoing thematic focus in this dissertation – as one event that attempts to ‘stabilise’ monotheism in biblical texts (and, as I continue, for the modern monotheist’s imaginary). More specifically, I explored through this chapter a range of biblical and – pulling forward Chapter Two’s eventualisation / singularity problematic – ‘historical’ narratives that strive to naturalise the language and function of chosen-ness and other ancillary benefits of a One and Only logic. For example, the discursive formation of a chosen-ness bound (by oath and scribe) to monotheism by the device of covenantal obligation is considered to bestow the promises (gifts) of relationship with God; the assurance of descendants; the assurance of land (later to become the myth of the empty land); and the formation of Israel (state/nation formation). Tracing this formation, I revisited key narratives and tropes across Exodus, the Deuteronomistic materials and Prophetic literature – again engaging Foucault’s ideas of genealogical analysis – to also illuminate discontinuities or singularities that, I argued, interrupted and disrupted the smooth progression of these

narratives of election and promise. My retracing also marked a third effort at the attempted regulation of monotheistic idea(l)s, in this case as retrojective retellings of a longed-for Judaic/Israelite history from divided monarchies and a scribal elite. The socio-political upheavals in the region (and its religions) and the Babylonian exile allowed for further cross-fertilisation of theologies that contributed to a sharpened One-God theology for biblical Israel. Complicating and destabilising this creation and maintenance (of identity, or particularity) of a One and Only God logic, however, are the tools from the formation of biblical studies and theology as academic disciplines engaging modern methodologies – as discussed in Chapter Two – which attempt to validate biblical archaeology and confirm the historical narrative of biblical texts. That is, the very methods used for validation also erode the groundwork of monotheistic logic. As shown, for instance, the methodologies of various forms of criticism, when applied to the literature of the Bible, along with developments in archaeology, suggest that monotheism could neither be thought of as original nor practiced by historical Israel, rather indicating a retrojection by the modern monotheist's imagination (Halpern 2009, 17).

This chapter thus showed that the link between the Babylonian Exile and the intensification of a divine singularity, unity and universal transcendence – considered formative of the structure and function of monotheism – is a theo-political imagining seeking to ground and legitimate (a certain) divine presence and interest in (human) social and political affairs. In addition, I made clear that monotheism's elements arose out of profound political and religious uncertainty for those in exile but that the sharpening focus into a One and Only logic contributed to the creation and maintenance of particular divine identities and worked to assist later configurations of Israel (further refining an ethnic distinctiveness used to exclude and marginalise others). Tracing the pluralities of gods and goddesses, divine beings, and heavenly messengers populating the texts considered to inform this sharpening focus, what becomes apparent is that these pluralities cannot as such offer the unity sought by a One and Only thinking. These points suggest that monotheism is only a thin layer of a palimpsest of biblical and ancient Near Eastern materials and later retrojections, constituting thereby another problem for claims for One-ness within the theo-political imaginary. Productive in its demonstrations of plurality, this chapter, however, also marks a transition point in my genealogical examinations of the traditions, texts and events of monotheism. Whilst I could certainly continue cataloguing and tracing instances of monotheistic thinking and of how biblical texts come to undermine both themselves and monotheism, such is open

to Socrates' recognition that the simple generation of examples enables only limited understandings – and mappings – of a problematic.⁴¹ This facilitated my turn to trace, in subsequent chapters, some of the ways other singularities – other theo-political thinkers, traditions and movements – had sought to reconcile or renegotiate the monotheistic problem of conceiving and legitimating the One and Only.

Having thus mapped as the first palimpsestuous layer of this genealogy a variety of the (biblical, historical and interpretative) events informing theological claims on and for God as the One and Only – events that also spin out (as) problematics of plurality and contestation – Chapter Four traces the progression(s) of an alternative apophatic theo-logic which insists that such problematics entail that the discursive structure of God is best understood as remaining hidden and beyond human understanding. However, while, as I show in this chapter, apophatic theological traditions have explicitly striven to reconcile aporias haunting the One and Only God, I have also shown that this approach – that of the *via negativa* – is typified by both a fascination for and an uneasiness with its own cogitations of divine plenitude. As such, it can only revisit and reinvest in God's semantic potential (and claims to One and Only thinking) by *elevating* God – distancing the divine from the world – to a mystical darkness circumscribed as the absence of language and thought, and thus ending with the stalling of productive sense. Nevertheless, while the *via negativa*'s attempts to resolve the problematic of One and Only thinking come to mark more impasses, they do open a rethinking as to just what thinking and comprehending entail. Recalling the *via negativa*'s rich tradition of denials – coupled with the problematics mapped in earlier chapters – I thus strove to show both that the metaphysics of presence that underpins mono-theo-logics had itself reached impasse, and that it was also being extended and rethought by what I have called the *via moderna negativa* of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers.

Chapter Five, then, marking another palimpsestuous overlay of the events, practices, pathways and impasses mapped in the preceding chapters, further highlights that the broader discursive problematic of presencing – as ordering reality and according privilege – is always already indicative of events, sites and practices of not only absence, exclusion and marginalisation but also of excess, multiplicity, friction and contestation. Indeed, the impasses of presencing detailed in Chapter Four (and throughout previous chapters) was itself also identified as being importantly generative

⁴¹ This recognition informs all of Plato's Socratic dialogues. For discussion of the problematic of examples, see Vlastos (1982) "The Socratic Elenchus".

in the sense of marking out alternative discursive articulations and practices for what I have called the *via moderna negativa*. As such, Chapter Five traced the *via moderna negativa* into the Nietzschean death of God project (event), further mapping its convolutions into Hegel's articulations of God (and subjectivity), and of what it is (for him) to *think* (negatively) and what it might be to take up a thinking stance. More specifically, Hegel's consideration of ideas of the limit of what may be thought, and his attempts to think beyond traditional 'God as centre' representational structures – marking practices of rupture in both language and representation – open additional questions about language and representation in the (negative) articulation of God (and self): In what sense do the slips and failures of language and representation, their silences and blindspots, prove in fact internal and essential to their very operation?

While Hegel's thinking offered a number of provocative trajectories for a genealogy of presence iterated by what I have called the *via moderna negativa*, a second set of possibilities can be traced through the *destruktive* eventuality of Heidegger's work, this comprising the focus of Chapter Six. As such, Chapter Six traces Heidegger's doubled response to his insight that the onto-theological structure of metaphysical enquiry has had deleterious effects on both philosophy and theology (Heidegger 2002, 42-74) and "the task of thinking" (2008d, 431-449). In order to explore Heidegger's consequent doubled 'retrieval' of metaphysics as a way to re-enter and rethink (some of) the underlying problematics at the heart of monotheism, I started with Rosenzweig's attempt to use translation as a mode of ontological retrieval. Rosenzweig's project (with Buber) to translate Luther's Bible – in particular its primeval stories, the name of God, and the binding of Isaac – into a more 'authentic' German experience raised the question of whether only a translation that preserved a sense of unfamiliarity could ensure the intensity, force and timeliness of the 'original'; even where this requires a creative violation of any number of (linguistic, theological) conventions. While, for both Rosenzweig and Heidegger, the pathways for a detemporalised metaphysics have foundered, translation for Heidegger is a force that can either destroy or recuperate ontological insight (Heidegger 1995, 22-26; 1987, 13). This suggests that Heidegger's own temporal *destruktive* retrieval of traditional ontology is less a destruction of tradition and rather the (translated) map of an aporia that (un)covers both the limited validity of the onto-theo-logical tradition and the implications of forgetting onto-theo-logic. Heidegger's thinking of a god as an event "passing by" may be precisely how the gods are present (cf. Heidegger 2014, 101). At the same time, perhaps Heidegger and

Rosenzweig and Buber are all repeating an essentially Mosaic gesture of supplementation.

What this chapter thus mapped, in tracing Heidegger's *destruktive* 'retrieval' or 'translation' of metaphysics, are further possible pathways regarding the eventalisation of presence and biblical disclosure(s), along with *eriegnis* (this being Heidegger's term for a 'coming into view', sometimes referred to as 'an event'). In drawing out Heidegger's responses to further trace the *via modern negativa*'s mapping of alternative – to onto-theo-logic(al) – ways to unfold and understand presence, this chapter also sketches a possible pathway toward the culmination of this dissertation: the disclosure of monotheism's own deconstruction. Indeed, engaging Heidegger's suggestions opens the idea that our 'destiny' – following the trajectory set by the German word *Geschick* – is not a return to any divine eternity or presence (or even absence) but instead traces – translates – the opening of a distancing from the divine: a distance that may perhaps enable different (ethical) configurations of biblical texts and monotheism.

Chapter Seven traces this distancing into the delays instantiated by Derrida's 'concepts' of *différance*, into how pluralities and supplementarity disrupt the desired work of presencing – in both its positive and negative modes – to stabilise meaning and identities. In other words, this chapter maps Derrida's deconstruction as another eventalisation of presencing and dis-closure. This was traced (positively and negatively) through constructs of covenant, naming and identity, and absence, appeal and hiddenness (all major themes interwoven and palimpsestuously interlayered throughout this dissertation) via several key biblical monotheistic narratives which strive to utilise presencing and (as) obligation. In total, the purpose of this chapter has been to show how Derrida's deconstructive apparatus of arche-writing, *différance*, the trace, play, and the supplement solicit – and reformulate – the events and capacities of (divine) presence as mapped in previous chapters (historically, theologically and philosophically). These themes, of course, carry over into this chapter, which strives in tracing the deconstruction of law (torah), to complete a deconstructive genealogy of monotheism. This, then, is the map which informs this final discussion, this final deconstructive interlayering into a genealogy of mono-theo-logic and (as) the problematic of presencing. This is a discussion of supplements rather than ends or beginnings, of hiddenness and suspensions, of the blurring – or irrecusable interweaving – of a One and Only with covenant with law with justice with deconstruction. And with the possibility – better, the supplement – of welcome to an other (other). If, however, these possible suspensions and supplementations of law as monotheism are to be opened

further into deconstruction as justice, we do need to remember Derrida's directions regarding the (im)possibilities of completely suspending or moving beyond law (and onto-theology).

Final Reflections Towards an Open-Ended Future

Derrida proclaimed his desire to “read and write in the space or heritage of the Bible” because – as he claims in *Acts of Literature* – “everything is in the Bible, everything and the rest” (1992a, 67). And, indeed, in response to a question from Caputo, he described the Bible as an “open field” from which he can receive “the most necessary provocations” (Derrida in Caputo 1997a, 21). In then describing deconstruction as justice and as “good conscience”, Derrida explicitly exhorted the biblical religions (of law) to confront the aporias at their hearts⁴² whilst tracing – as part of such confrontation – some of the subversive webs of connections he sees as playing throughout them (Derrida 1995a, 85-87). It is in this vein that, despite having been prone to take the vocabulary of biblical studies and theology – words like ‘apocalypse’, ‘salvation’, ‘circumcision’, ‘messianicity’, ‘Elijah’, ‘Shibboleth’⁴³ – giving them back to the biblical scholar and theologian in provocatively distorted forms,⁴⁴ and despite signing himself on occasion as ‘Reb Rida’ and ‘Reb Derissa’ (see, e.g., Derrida 1978a; 1978b), Derrida has also claimed that:

⁴² Yvonne Sherwood suggests that biblical studies, theology, religion and philosophy all need to incorporate Derrida's challenge to move beyond self-legitimizing boundaries, to take their “cue from the (as yet?) far less well-known (also Derridean) figures of God[s]-in-scripture and God-in-the-process-of-becoming-Scripture” (2004, 12). Such a move, she continues, “may produce smaller, different gods, gods in relation to time and language” (ibid.).

⁴³ From the Hebrew, the word ‘shibboleth’ translates as ‘ear of corn’. It is a custom, doctrine, or phrase which distinguishes a particular group of people. The word shibboleth was used as a test of nationality for its difficult pronunciation. See Judges 12:6. See my discussion on the function of Shibboleth in Chapter Seven, 239n16.

⁴⁴ Cleo McNelly Kearns (2008), specifically in her work on Marian theology, takes up this challenge. Drawing on Derrida's reading of Rousseau's notion of the scandal or lapse, Kearns examines both the centrality that Mary has within Christianity and her role outside of Christianity. The scandal of Mary, the lapse at work here is to be found in the centrality that Mary occupies in a faith professing monotheism. Under Kearns' engagement with Rousseau and Derrida, Mary's place in Christianity, her role as Mother of the Son of Man, is always already a lapse, a scandal, even more so when she responds affirmatively to the annunciation, a response that sees her become a vehicle for the dissemination of the divine logos. Mary, in other words, “is both the means by which the Word of God becomes incarnate and the moment the Word undoes itself through supplementarity and dissemination” (Caputo, Dooley and Scanlon 2001, 16). Kearns' (scandalous) argument is thus that Mary is able to transcend the (supposed) closure of logocentrism by opening herself up to an open-ended future.

For me, there is no such thing as “religion.” Within what one calls religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam or other religions – there are again tensions, heterogeneity, disruptive volcanoes, sometimes texts, especially those of the prophets, which cannot be reduced to an institution, to a corpus, to a system. I want to keep the right to read these texts in a way which has to be constantly reinvented. (Derrida in Caputo 1997a, 21)

This reading is not only deconstructive – a supplementation of the law – but also, as such, ethical. Such reading is also, I suggest, indicative of the ethical call enabled by genealogy and eventalisation, which is, as described at the beginning of this project, to experiment in going beyond the “limits that are imposed on us” by our traditions, our institutions and our subsequent logics (Foucault 1984, 50). In all cases, the demand is for another approach and way of reading, for another writing, and for another welcoming of the other. (The trouble, of course, as Derrida also points out, is not only that such welcoming fast becomes itself a limit but that in responding to any one other, one is always, to some irreducible extent, in neglect of all the other others.⁴⁵)

So what demand might another – other – readings of these texts, traditions, laws and logics make possible? Can there be more than simply the recognition of these texts’ incessant supplementarity, or the need for recognition and inclusion of peoples, practices and events that are over-written and overcome? That is, do these strategies of deconstruction offer more than a new impasse due, in this case, to the in(de)finite obligation of this ethic? In these concluding remarks I suggest that it is possible to move beyond the delimitation and inherent deconstruction of the One and Only logic and obligation, a delimitation I have concurrently traced through the Hebrew Bible and its reiterations in archaeology, history, theology, and philosophy. More specifically, I have here taken a cue from what I see as Assmann’s proposal for an ethical monotheism developed by deconstructing the space between “Israel in truth” and “Egypt in error” (1997, 8). It is, after all, in the interstice of these two ideas that distinction – as a propensity for exclusion – thrives, and so deconstructive strategies dictate that it must also be in this space between that a beyond and a to-come, ethically speaking, can be sketched.

How could an ethical call in and of this space be imagined? Such would be an ethic in which it is possible to re-inscribe or re-translate the Bible – if it is to continue to

⁴⁵ For example, in choosing to respond to God’s call as he did, to answer to some ultimate divine responsibility, Abraham had to deceive and turn his back on his family obligations and prepare to sacrifice his son; to be both responsible and irresponsible. Derrida therefore also relates responsibility, in another type of self-division or seeming self-contradiction, to forms of secrecy, mystery, heresy or dissidence. See his discussion of Abraham in *The Gift of Death* (1995a; also see Mummery 2006).

be a focal point for living in relationship and for constructing identity – with a focus on relationalities and differentiated commonalities rather than on identities based on difference and exclusion. My suggestion here with regards to this issue of reconfiguring an ethic from the Hebrew Bible is to propose a re-engagement with one of the major events in the creation and maintenance of monotheism and (as) Israelite identity – the exile. I suggest that a return to ‘exile’ – to, better, an ‘exilic stance’, a stance exemplifying the rejection of both “Israel in truth” and “Egypt in error” – might facilitate a move beyond the exclusions associated with monotheism, further allowing a reimagining of covenantal relationship.

Judaism and by extension, Jewish peoples – across their re-presentations biblical, literal and historical, and in their lived experiences – have a long history of landlessness, immigration, diaspora, and exile. If an ethic were based on the idea of exile – of always already being a stranger in a strange land, of always wandering whilst making and re-making home while always imagining anew a future to-come – it is possible that such an ‘exilic stance’ could provide the conditions not to construe covenantal relationship and obligation, self-identity and the identity of the divine as always over and against others. It is possible that such an imagining might be less divisive and more responsive in terms of how a hospitality might operate. If we assume that language is not separable from reality, a veil to be lifted, but rather shapes and is shaped by ethos, then the obligation to others, to human others or just fleshly others, should surely overwrite any obligation to any (radically transcendent) divine, particularly when the core of divine behaviour can outright unethical. Such reimagining of ethical response in the terms of a return to exile is a gesture that also follows my interpretation of the Midrashic tradition of reading, according to which Israel is always already in exile, even when in the Promised Land. Here the charge to listen (Shema) is closely followed by the charge to remember (to re-call) the idea of exile as a site in cultural memory. I suggest that it is with this double call and recall that there exists a possibility of reconfiguring a relationality with the other – and other others – that is then supplemented with relationality with (a constitutively hidden) and (as) overwritten God. The call to a ‘promised land’ (as) the already always exile is in turn a promise of an always already supplemented relationality, a promise to this hidden and supplemented God. I suggest, then, that the promise-to-come of land in conjunction with an exilic stance in perpetuity might comprise one way to move beyond the current impasses of identity and obligation, configuring an ethical way of responding to and living with

other others. The endless deferral (land/exile) would be one way of keeping ethical calls and their respondents responsive in that moment, and in relation.

In suggesting what such a call might look like, I must also, however, be attentive to the possible response to such a sketch. I must listen (Shema) to how such a call might be heard by Others. In particular, I imagine one response to my call for a 'return to exile' would be the criticism that exclusionary monotheism itself has its origin in the trauma of the Babylonian exile (in fact, in many exiles, pogroms and events of Diaspora), in the need for an identity over and against the Other in response to this trauma. As such, how could a 'return to exile' be productive for a deconstructed ethical monotheism? I answer thusly: The historical exile and identity formation arising out of that exilic experience has been concretised (canonised even). That is to say, that experience of exile is a 'now' and an 'is' in an historically-realised way. Assmann's point engaged with in a previous section, where he questioned the choice to construct a monotheism and its adherent identities out of a language of violence and exclusion, is important here for illustrating the way a particularist and historically situated exile responses and identity has been concretised. It could have had a different configuration.

In imagining the to-come (always, already) at home in exile, Agamben's recounting of the rabbi's story is helpful. The story recounts a (little) displacement in which everything remains the same but also a (little) different. The reconfiguration of a relation such as this represents this slight displacement, and 'dis-placement' is a cultural memory if not an experience for many people. To live in dis-placement by choice is an opportunity to live mindfully and meaningfully with Others. This kind of relationality is not primarily driven by a concern for the divine (or the noumenal world) but with/for the Other (and the phenomenal world). A call for a 'return to exile' could reinvigorate a notion of an ethic of responsibility and hospitality where those who choose to 'return to exile' become attuned to Others and more responsive. The idea of an always, already in exile or a 'return to exile' challenges the (in)hospitable particularist identities grounded in monotheistic (and monologic) thinking. The particularity and divisive construal of 'us' against 'them' identities espoused by a logic of a One and Only thinking should give way to living with/in open community in which justice, compassion, and mercy keep divine law and human laws claiming divine authorship from becoming unremitting and cruel.

The call for a 'return to exile' is a speculative gesture that I offer. I am not here calling for a literal state of exile, and I am not here suggesting that Jewish people be singled out when I draw on the language of a 'return to exile' or, indeed, 'dis-

placement'. After all, there are many groups in addition to the Jewish people who have experience of exile and diaspora. I do, however, think that the idea and language of a 'return to exile' in the context of the Judeo-Christian traces of monotheism I have been engaging with throughout the dissertation could be a productive heuristic. My idea for a 'return to exile' is a call for a theo-politics of hospitality, for responsibility grounded where a situated listening and subsequent relationality takes priority over the divine, and where actions are conducted not in the name of 'our God', or 'my God' or any Other God, but in the names of (named and un-named) others.

What might we *hear* if we listen beyond the clamour of law? What *call* could be made to attract attention? I call for a 'return to exile', and the idea of a 'return to exile' could certainly be heard, but *how* might it be heard? As noted above, the call is a way to shift – to 'dis-place' – entrenched ways of viewing and responding to the Other. It is a way to escape the construction of inscribed identities, the recognising only of inscribed identities. Such a call opens up the conditions for the possibility of a relationality grounded in the phenomenal world but also informed by the to-come, by a futural projection and aspiration. Such a call would mark a responsibility to renew hospitality and relationality at every opportunity. Such a call would invite all into 'exile', and not just marginalised or elected groups. Because being 'in exile' entails not feeling at-home, all 'in exile' should be called to engage responsibly (and, following Derrida, 'irresponsibly') beyond the delimitation of both inscribed law and justice. Being all 'in exile' also makes clear the point that all laws need to be investigated for exclusionary operations, that all others need to be listened for and to. Being 'in exile' would thus be other than the Mosaic stance of supplementing God and law in the hopes of stabilising both (even as such efforts destabilise both). Rather than exposing a supplementarity in the name of law (or God), it would do so in the name of an opened justice.

The (always, already) 'in exile' could be a basis for a cohabitation that would shelter multiple frameworks/ways of living without instantiating exclusion. The effect of such a call to 'return to exile' would be to destabilise the ontology of difference grounded in monotheistic frameworks as well as to understand – to *listen* (and to *respond*) to – the ethical and political implications of relations to alterity. Such a relationality, which is surely not particularist, not totalising, would be a pathway beyond identity (and religion, and nation) as defining framework. Such a gesture rather hopes to instantiate a relation to alterity as constitutive of identity, which is to say that the relation to alterity interrupts identity, and this interruption (this 'dis-placement') is the

condition of ethical relationality, and one way beyond the ethical impasse of monotheism.

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